Unit -1

POETICS – ARISTOTLE

Unit Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is to familiarize the learners with Aristotle's ideas of poetry, tragedy, epic and imitation. This chapter also will explain the terms like *catharsis* and *mimesis* which are central to Aristotle's notion of poetics.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL CRITICISM

Literary criticism is as ancient as literature. In ancient Greece, scholars studying literature had developed literary criticism, a branch of study enabling better understanding and appreciation of literature. The word criticism itself is derived from the Greek root *krinei* that means 'to judge'. The Greek term originated around the 4th century and later in English Literature, the term criticism was applied to the study and analysis of literature. The term criticism developed in the 17th century Europe and it was further developed in the 20th century with more branches like literary theory, literary history and literary criticism evolving out of it.

Literary criticism has its origin in ancient Greece and Rome. Contemporary critics still draw heavily on Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus and Quintilian, to whose writings one can trace the beginnings of different approaches to literary criticism.

Plato was the first critic to contemplate the role of literature in society. For Plato, poets had no place in the perfect society. Aristotle, his disciple, did not have Plato's anxieties about the effects of literature on society. He was the first critic to analyse tragedy in its constituent elements. Horace, the first important Roman critic, suggests that poet should select a form suitable to his material. He says: "The secret of all good writing is sound judgment." Longinus, who wrote "On the Sublime" emphasizes the importance of stylistic mastery, grandeur of thought and powerful emotion as the elements of sublimity. Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* provides a close study of individual works of Greek and Roman poets.

Classical literary criticism takes its origin from classical philosophy. It was evolved mostly from the views of Plato and Aristotle, who made a sustained and systematic enquiry into the nature, elements and forms of art.

Plato and Aristotle were two Greek philosophers who had made some efforts in describing certain forms of poetry and in considering their functions. Plato was the first western philosopher to expound a theory of Art and he influenced many other thinkers of his era. In his famous work, *Republic*, Plato tries to define poetry and comments on its functions. He argues that poet should be banished from an ideal state on two grounds – metaphysical and ethical. He says that all art forms are fictional and hence they are untrue and they twist and distort truth. Plato comments in *Republic*:

> This was the conclusion at which I was seeking to arrive when I said that painting or drawing, and imitation in general are engaged upon productions which are removed from truth, and are also the companions and friends and associates of a principle within us which is equally removed from reason, and that they have no true or healthy aim. (35)

Plato also considers Art as an imitation and he also talks about the need of all arts to be guided by moral principles.

Aristotle, who developed his interest in Mathematics, Philosophy, Natural Science and Arts gives his ideas about art and literature largely in four works – *Ethics, Metaphysics, Rhetoric and Poetics*. Aristotle dismisses Plato's view that the poet ought to be a moral instructor and indicates that correctness in poetry is not the

same thing as correctness in morals. His *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* in particular provide his concepts on literary forms, style, imitation and other critical issues. His works are his lecture notes gathered by his students and hence they are not properly developed essays. Both Plato and Aristotle have given World Literature certain ideas and definitions about the nature of literature, function of literature and forms of literature.

In classical criticism, the notion of reality is closely associated with the term *Mimesis* – a term that also stands for imitation, representation or the act of resembling. Reality and the term *Mimesis* have been theorized extensively by Plato and Aristotle. Plato writes about reality in both *Ion* and *Republic*. In *Ion,* Plato states that poetry is the art of divine madness and hence it is not directly concerned with reality. He also maintains that writing and acting were not sufficient in conveying the truth. In his Book II of *The Republic*, Plato warns the readers that they should not seriously regard poetry as being capable of attaining truth. He maintains that what is real is rarely reproduced in Art. He develops this argument with the notion of three beds. Plato says that one bed exists as an idea made by God. It represents the ideal reality. The second bed is made by the carpenter which according to Plato is an imitation of God's idea. The second bed is a copy of reality, according to Plato. He says that the bed represented in an art form by an artist becomes a copy of a copy and hence twice removed from reality. Plato interprets art as a representation of twice removed truth. He maintains that artists, as imitators, only touch on a small part of things.

Plato also compares the truth value of the creations of craftsmen and poets. He argues that poets do not possess the knowledge of craftsmen and are mere imitators who copy images time and again for sheer happiness. Plato also says that poets never reach the truth the way the superior philosophers do.

Aristotle also has commented on reality and its imitation in art. He considers *mimesis* as the perfection and imitation of nature. He says that Art is not only imitation but it also uses mathematical ideas and symmetry to attain a degree of perfection. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that poetry reflects and represents reality. However, Aristotle considers it important that there be a difference between real life and a work of art. He also maintains that this difference gives rise to *catharsis* or emotional cleansing. Yet, Aristotle maintains that the audience should be able to identify with the characters or events in the text and unless this identification happens, the text does not touch the audience. He says that *mimesis* is a form of simulated representation which aims to have some response from the audience. Thus, Aristotle places reality in art between recognizable representation and aesthetic distance. To

prove this point of reality in art, he compares the facts of literature with the facts of history. Aristotle indicates that history deals with specific facts that have happened whereas literature deals with events that could have taken place or ought to have taken place. He considers this kind of reality as ideal truth. Michael Davis, a translator and commentator of Aristotle explains that *mimesis* is an act of representing reality in a stylized manner.

Plato and Aristotle hold completely different notions of reality. Their respective notions of reality are conditioned by their assumptions about truth, knowledge and goodness. For Plato, Art imitates a world that is already far removed from authentic reality, truth. He argues that truth exists only in intellectual abstraction and it is more real than concrete objects. He also believes that universal essence – the idea or the form of a thing – is more real and hence more important than its physical substance. Plato's view is that the tangible world is an imperfect reflection of the universal world of forms. Further, he maintains that human observations based on these reflections are, therefore, highly suspect. He also observes that the result of any human effort, at the best, is an indistinct expression of truth. For Plato, knowledge of truth and knowledge of good are virtually inseparable. He advocates a rejection of the physical in favour of reason, in an abstract and intellectual mode. He argues that art is removed from any notion of real truth and it is a flawed copy of an already imperfect world. Hence, he believes that art, as an imitation, is irrelevant to what is real.

Aristotle approaches reality from a different premise. For him, the world exists in a diverse series of parts. He believes that these different parts are open to human observation and scrutiny. He thinks that knowledge of truth and good are rooted firmly in the observable universe. Aristotle also believes that the different parts of the universe require different discourses. In *Poetics*, Aristotle considers one method of enquiry which is applicable to tragedy. He says that tragedy attempts to imitate the complex world of human actions and yet tragedy itself is a part of larger world of human existence. He considers tragedy as a manifestation of a human desire to imitate because he believes that each person "learns his lessons through imitation and we observe that all men find pleasure in imitations." This formulation implies that the self referential function of tragedy gives it a place in Aristotle's notion of reality.

Plato conceives that an artist lacks any substantial knowledge of the subject that is imitated. He believes that an artist merely copies the surface, the appearance of a thing without the need for understanding of awareness of its substance. He observes in *The Republic* that the artist is "an imitator of images and is far removed from the truth." Aristotle on the other hand perceives the process of imitation in a slightly different way. He describes

imitation as a creative process of selection and transformation from one medium to another. He indicates that a literary artist attempts to imitate human action and not specific individuals. Poetry, he argues, can be described as human action given a new form by language.

Though both Plato and Aristotle use the word *mimesis* to describe art, the definition derived by each one is profoundly different. The process of imitation explained by each philosopher promotes the particular version of reality conceived by each one. A study of the notion of reality in classical criticism helps in tracing the central philosophical conflict regarding the usage and importance of imitation in art.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO ARISTOTLE

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was an eminent Greek philosopher. He was also devoted to many branches of knowledge like mathematics, political philosophy, natural science and the Arts. His writings run into many volumes and he had established his own academy of learning. He is also known as a tutor of Alexander the great, who almost conquered a part of North Western India. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle addresses many problems that Plato had raised, about the function and nature of poetry. His other famous works include *Ethics*, *Metaphysics* and *Rhetoric*. *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* contain the bulk of literary criticism of Aristotle and both were his lecture notes. *Poetics* raises many important critical issues constantly debated by scholars. Since *Poetics* is read in translation, there is a wide disagreement among the scholars about the meaning and implication of the terms used in the work. *Poetics* also made terms like *mimesis, catharsis, hamartia* and *hubris* popular in literary criticism.

Poetics contains 26 chapters, which deal with different forms of poetry, nature of poetry, poetic truth and tragedy.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF *POETICS*

The structural division of poetics can be as follows:

Chapters 1-3: deal with poetry as imitation, poetry as a medium and the object and manner of representation.

Chapters 4-5: trace the historical origin of poetry. They also introduce the distinction between epic and tragedy.

Chapter 6: Definition of tragedy

Chapters 7,8,10 and11: They are about plot and tragedy – types of plot and the requirements of plot.

Chapters 9 and25: They deal with historic truth and poetic truth

Chapter 12: Elements of a tragedy

Chapter 13: Reversal of fortune in tragedy

Chapter 14: Pity and fear along with the notion of *catharsis*

Chapter 15: Character in tragedy and the notion of tragic hero

Chapters 16, 17 and 18: Devices used in tragedy such as reversal and recognition

Chapters 19, 28, 21, 22: They deal with diction language, thought and style

Chapters 23, 24 and 26: Distinction between epic and tragedy

Poetics can also be divided according to the following concepts:

1. Theory of Imitation, as an improvement upon Plato's theory

2. Definition of tragedy

3. Plot and character

4. Historic truth and poetic truth

5. The notion of catharsis

6. Concept of tragic hero

7. Distinction between epic and tragedy

1.4 *POETICS*: AN OVERVIEW

Aristotle's *Poetics* defines different kinds of poetry; it explains the structure of a good poem and considers poetry as a form of imitation. He defines poetry as a "medium of imitation" that tries to represent life through character, emotion and action. Further, he classifies poetry into broad categories such as epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poem and some kinds of music.

Aristotle says that tragedy evolves from the efforts of a poet to present men as nobler as or better than they are in real life. Comedy, on the other hand, represents a lower life and reveals human beings to be worse than they are. Epic poetry, according to

Aristotle, imitates noble men like in tragedy but has only one meter unlike tragedy (which is written in a variety of meters) and is narrative in form.

Aristotle lays out six elements of tragedy: plot (*mythos*), character (*ethos*), thought (*dianoia*), diction (*lexis*), melody (*melos*) and spectacle (*opsis*). He argues that plot is a soul of tragedy because action is of highest significance in a drama. Aristotle says that all other elements are subsidiary. Further, he maintains that a plot must have a beginning, middle and end; it must have universal significance and should maintain unities of theme and purpose.

Plot, according to Aristotle, must contain elements of astonishment, reversal (*peripetia*), recognition (*anagnorisis*), and suffering (*pathos*). Reversal is an ironic turn or change by which the main action of the story changes its course. Recognition, he says, is the change from ignorance to knowledge usually involving people who understand one another's true identities. Suffering is a destructive or painful action which is often the result of reversal or recognition. Aristotle says that these three elements cascade to create *catharsis* which is the evocation of fear and pity in the audience – pity for the tragic hero's life, and the fear that the tragic hero's fate might be universal.

Aristotle says that poets should keep in mind four significant points in approaching characterization. First, the hero must be good and hence should manifest moral purpose in his speech. Second, the hero should have propriety or manly valour. Thirdly, the hero must be true to life. Finally, the hero must be consistent.

Aristotle observes that tragedy and epic fall into the same categories: simple, complex (propelled by reversal and recognition), ethical (moral) or pathetic (passion). However, Aristotle maintains that there are few differences between tragedy and epic. First, an epic does not employ song or spectacle or achieve its cathartic effect. Second, epic cannot be presented or read in a single sitting, whereas tragedy is usually for a single viewing. Finally, he observes that the heroic rhythm of epic poetry is hexameter where tragedy uses other forms of meter to achieve varied rhythms of different characters and speeches.

Aristotle also lays out his theory of *mimesis* in *Poetics*. He says that the poet must imitate things as they are, things as they are thought to be or things as they ought to be. He observes that the poet also imitates in action and in language. He says that errors creep in when the poet imitates incorrectly or when the poet accidentally makes an error (a factual error, for instance). However, Aristotle does not believe that factual errors spoil the entire work.

He says that the errors that compromise the unity of a given work are more serious.

Aristotle concludes by addressing the question whether epic or tragedy is a higher form. Contrary to the opinions of the critics of his time who used to argue that tragedy was for an inferior audience and epic was for a cultivated audience, Aristotle opines that tragedy is a superior form. He argues that tragedy is superior to epic because it has all the elements of epic along with spectacle and music to provide an indulgent pleasure for the audience.

1.5 ARISTOTLE'S VIEWS ON TRAGEDY

The centre piece of Aristotle's *Poetics* is his examination of tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy, explains its constituent parts and compares it with epic. He writes:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper *catharsis* of these emotions.

Aristotle indicates that the medium of tragedy is drama and not narrative. He says that tragedy "shows" rather than "tells". According to him tragedy is higher and more philosophical than history because history simply relates what has happened while tragedy dramatizes what may happen, "what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity." He says that history deals with the particular and tragedy with the universal. Real events that have happened may be due to accident or coincidence and they may not be a part of a clear cause-effect chain. Therefore, they have little relevance for others. Tragedy, on the other hand, is rooted in the fundamental order of the universe and it creates a cause and effect chain that clearly reveals what *may* happen at any time or place because that is the way the world operates. Tragedy therefore arouses not only pity but also fear, because the audience can place themselves within this cause and effect chain.

Aristotle considers plot as the first principle and the most important feature of tragedy. He defines plot as the "arrangement of incidents". He implies that plot is not just the story but the way incidents are presented to the audience. According to him, the outcome of the tragedy depends on a tightly constructed cause and effect chain of actions. He also considers that plot to be more important than the character and personality of the protagonist.

Aristotle also considers the ideal structure of a good plot. He says that the plot must be a whole with a beginning, middle and end. The beginning is described as the starting point of the cause and effect chain. The middle is caused by earlier incidents and itself becomes the cause of incidents that follow it. The end must be caused by the preceding events and should resolve the problems created during the first two stages.

Aristotle also says that the plot must be complete, having unity of action. By this, Aristotle implies that the plot must be structurally self contained, with the incidents bound together by internal necessity. According to him, the worst kinds of plots are episodic in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence.

Aristotle observes that the plot of a tragedy should be of certain magnitude, both quantitatively (length) and qualitatively (seriousness). He argues that the plot should not be too brief and the more incidents that the playwright can bring together in an organic unity, the greater the artistic value and richness of the play.

Aristotle says that the plot may be either simple or complex although the complex plot is better. According to him simple plot have only a change of fortune (*catastrophe*) whereas complex plots have both reversal (*peripetia*) and recognition and (*anagnorisis*) connected with the *catastrophe*. Both *peripetia* and *anagnorisis* turn upon surprise. Aristotle explains that a *peripatia* occurs when a character produces an effect opposite to that which he intended to produce. *Anagnorisis* is defined as a journey from ignorance to knowledge producing love or hate between the persons destined for good or bad fortune.

Aristotle is of the view that the plot must be of certain magnitude: neither too large nor too small. He also speaks about the unity of plot. For him, the unity consists in the structural union of the parts which are so arranged that, if one part is removed or displaced, the whole will be spoilt. He maintains that complex plots can be identified as the ones which have reversal and recognition as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Further, he says that fear and pity must be aroused in a tragedy by spectacular means but it is better if they result from the inner structure of the play.

Aristotle also theorizes on the character in a tragedy. He indicates that the character must be good. He also implies that character must be appropriate, the right type, i.e. a man should be brave and a woman should not necessarily be brave but neither she should be unscrupulously clever. Aristotle, further, insists that character must be consistent and he says that the poet should aim at either the necessary or the probable so that the character will be

credible. He says that the poet should not only preserve the type of character but also ennoble it.

Another segment of Aristotle's view on tragedy is on thought. Aristotle maintains that thought consists of every effect that has to be produced by speech, proof, refutation, excitation of the feelings or suggestion of importance. For him, thought is one of the causes of action and it covers mind's activities from reasoning, perception and formulation of emotion. He further states that thought is expressed in speeches in a tragedy and is therefore closely linked to diction.

Diction is one of the elements in Aristotle's perception of tragedy. Diction covers language and its use: the way command, request, prayer, statement or question is expressed. Aristotle evokes the study of rhetoric in the context of diction and proposes analysis of words, sentence, letter, syllable, inflection and phrase. Further, he examines metaphors such as the metaphors of light and darkness in *Oedipus Tyrranus*. He also examines lyric poetry as it is seen in choral odes.

Aristotle indicates that song and spectacle are the elements concerned with the production of the play. Though they are essential parts of tragedy, the concern of the poet is less for them compared to his concern for plot, character and thought. Aristotle considers chorus as a device that upholds both song and spectacle. He also maintains that the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors and even of greater importance as the chorus has a unifying function in a tragedy.

1.6 ARISTOTLE'S VIEWS ON IMITATION (*MIMESIS*)

Aristotle uses the word *mimesis* in its various connotations such as re-enactment, impersonation or representation. In *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates that *mimesis* or the act of imitation itself is a source of pleasure. Further, he classifies different types of poetry according to their respective modes of imitation. He says that certain art forms imitate by means of language alone, either in prose or verse. When this imitation is in verse it may combine different meters to create a rhythm. Aristotle considers writers like Homer and Empedocles as the best exponents of imitation in meter. He considers three differences that distinguish artistic imitation – the medium, the object and the manner. He differentiates this kind of imitation from the imitation in dramatic poetry. Aristotle says that in dithyrambic and nomic poetry, the modes of imitation such as rhythm, tune and meter are all employed in combination, and in tragedy, "now one means is employed, now another". (p-3) This, according to Aristotle, is the

chief difference in the art forms with respect to the medium of imitation.

Aristotle also speaks about the objects of imitation in *Poetics*. He says that men in action are the real objects of imitation and he classifies imitation into two with respect to the categories of men:

> Since the objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of a higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. It is the same in painting. Polygnots depicted men as nobler than they are, Pauson as less noble, Dionysius drew them true to life. (p-3)

Aristotle speaks about a third difference, the manner in which these objects may be imitated. He explains his views on the style of imitation:

> For the medium being the same, and the objects the same, the poet may imitate by narration – in which case he can either take another personality as Homer does, or speak in his own person, unchanged – or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us. (p-4)

Aristotle also traces the origin of poetry in the mankind's interest in imitation. He says that the instinct of imitation is implanted deeply in man from childhood and the basic difference in man and other animals is that he is the most imitative of living creatures. Aristotle defends *mimesis* by stating that man learns his earliest lessons through imitation and that it offers a universal pleasure. He also maintains that much of the pleasure in imitation depends on the minute fidelity. He explains the cause of pleasure in imitation:

> The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. (p-6)

Aristotle also defines tragedy and comedy as two different forms of imitation. Tragedy is considered as an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain length. Comedy is defined as an imitation of ordinary men in action.

Though Aristotle uses the basic notion of imitation as in Plato, he disagrees with Plato on certain features of imitation. Plato had mentioned that poetic imitation was a deviation from truth. Aristotle, in contrast, thinks that imitation is a recreation of something that is better than reality. In his *Poetics,* he says:

> Epic poetry and Tragedy, as also Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry, and most flute playing and lyre playing are all, viewed as a whole; modes of imitation. (p-1)

Aristotle does not discuss all types of art in his *Poetics*. He speaks only of Epic poetry, tragedy, comedy and dithyrambic poetry and music along with their respective mimetic nature. He equates poetry with music while Plato had equated poetry with thinking. Aristotle is of the opinion that poetry and music have a deeper significance than painting which is concerned with what has actually happened and what may happen; not as in painting which cannot go deep into reality. He says that the poet should imitate men who are better than they are in natural life and thus a poet should transform from being an imitator to be a maker. In this context, the term imitation is like 'creation'. Aristotle says that a poet deals with human thoughts and passions as they always are. He also opines that the poet should observe human beings very closely and should try and imitate the passions of humanity rather than an individual.

Aristotle is also of the view that poetry becomes an idealized representation of life and centuries later Hegel had considered art as the sensuous representation of the ideal. Idealization is one of the constituents of Aristotle's notion of *mimesis*. Aristotle's theory of *mimesis* is best reflected in his thought on drama. He defines drama as an imitation of action and tragedy as falling from a higher to a lower state.

Aristotle considers that the principle of imitation unites poetry with other fine arts and is a common basis of all the fine arts. He says that poet selects and orders his material and recreates reality. According to him, poet brings order out of chaos by removing irrational or accidental and by focusing on the lasting and the significant.

Aristotle also talks about the nature of imitation seen in poetry in contrast with how it figures in history. He says that history tells us what has happened; poetry what may happen. For him poetry tends to express the universal; history the particular. In this way he argues for the superiority of poetry over history. He also maintains that poet shares the interest in the universe with the philosopher. Aristotle explains the word 'universal' – how a person

of a certain nature or type will, on particular occasion, speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity. Elsewhere, Aristotle says art imitates nature. By the word nature, he does not mean the outer world of created things but the creative force, the productive principle of the universe. He believes that the poet imitates the creative process of nature though the objects of imitation are men in action. However, he maintains that the action may be external or internal, as for instance, the action within the soul caused by all that befalls a man. Thus, Aristotle brings human experiences, emotions and passions within the scope of poetic imitation. According to his theory, moral qualities, characteristics, the permanent temper of the mind and the temporary emotions are all action and so objects of poetic imitation.

Aristotle's theory of imitation is also his refutation of Plato's charges on poetry. While Plato has mentioned that poetry is an imitation of shadow of shadows and hence thrice removed from the truth, Aristotle tells us that Art imitates not the mere appearance of things, but the ideal reality embodied in the very object of the world. Aristotle says that poetry reproduces the original not as it is, but as it appears to the senses. He also says that the poet does not copy the external world but creates according to his idea of it. Thus even an ugly object well imitated becomes a source of pleasure. He observes in the *Poetics* that the sources of pleasure include:

> Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity; such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and dead bodies. (p-6)

Michael Davies, a translator and commentator of Aristotle explains his views on Aristotle's theory of imitation:

> At first glance, *mimesis* seems to be a stylizing of reality in which the ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain exaggeration, the relationship of the imitation to the object it imitates being something like the relationship of dancing to walking. Imitation always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really has no beginning or end. *Mimesis* involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. Thus the more "real" the imitation the more fraudulent it becomes (Davis-23)

Aristotle not only theorizes his notion of *mimesis* in *Poetics* but also refutes the charge of Plato that poetry has not truth value.

He breathes a new life and soul into the concept of poetic imitation by aligning it with creative process.

1.7 ARISTOTLE'S VIEWS ON *CATHARSIS*

Catharsis is a Greek term which means purification, purging or cleansing. It is generally used in relation to drama that derives from strong feelings such as sorrow, pity and fear. Drama is considered as a medium for purging such emotions. Aristotle was the first philosopher to use the term *catharsis* to refer to the emotional effects of a tragedy.

One of the most difficult concepts introduced in *Poetics* is *catharsis*. Scholars are still debating the actual meaning of *catharsis* in Aristotle's text though it is most often defined as a purging of the emotions that happens when one watches a tragedy. The psychological process involved in this purging is not clear in *Poetics*. However Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* is widely understood in relation to a larger concern with the psychological and social purpose of literature.

There are various interpretations available of the term *catharsis* and the term has outgrown the purgation theory which is too much occupied with the psychology of the audience. However, Aristotle was not writing a treatise on psychology but on the art of poetry. Aristotle relates catharsis not really to the emotion of the spectators but to the incidents which form the plot of a tragedy. Hence, *catharsis* can be considered more as clarification than purgation. Aristotle suggests that the pleasure in tragedy, paradoxically, springs from incidents that evoke pity and fear. These incidents include events such as a man blinding himself or a mother killing her children as seen in *Oedipus* and *Medea* respectively. In this context, *catharsis* refers to the tragic variety of pleasure. Imitation does not produce pleasure in general, but only the pleasure that comes from learning, and so also the particular pleasure of tragedy. Learning in tragedy comes from discovering the relation between the action and the universal elements embodied in it. The poet might take his material from history or tradition; but he orders it in terms of probability and necessity. In this process he rises from the particular to the general and so he is more universal. Tragedy, thus, enhances understanding and leaves the spectators face to face with the universal law. Thus, according to this interpretation, *catharsis* means classification of the essential and universal significance of the incidents depicted, leading to an enhanced understanding of the universal law which governs human life and destiny. Such an understanding leads to the pleasure of tragedy. In this sense, *catharsis* is neither a medical nor a moral term, but an intellectual term. The term refers to the incidents

depicted in the tragedy and the way in which the poet reveals their universal significance.

According to Aristotle, the basic tragic emotions are pity and fear which are essentially painful. He implies that if tragedy is to give pleasure, pity and fear must be eliminated. He indicates that fear is aroused when we see someone suffering and we think that similar fate might befall us. Pity is a feeling of pain caused by the sight of undeserved suffering of others. The spectators see that it is the tragic error or *hamartia* of the hero which results in suffering and so he learns something about the universal relation between character and destiny.

One can say that Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* is mainly intellectual. It is neither purely didactic nor fully theoretical though it may have some theological elements. Aristotle's *catharsis* is not just a moral doctrine that compels a tragic poet to show that bad men come to bad ends. It is part of his commentary on the function of tragedy and the functions of the different parts of tragedy.

1.8 ARISTOTLE COUNTERS PLATO'S CHARGES AGAINST POETRY

Poetics is often read as Aristotle's defence of poetry against the charges of Plato. Aristotle debate with Plato is rooted on four main areas of poetry – imitation, moral value, truth value and emotional effects. Plato had, in his republic considered poetry as an imitation of an imitation, twice removed from reality and had called poetry 'mother of all lies.' Plato had also objected to poetry on emotional grounds a s he believed poetry exited emotions in men, making them misfits in a rational republic. He had also condemned poetry for not punishing vices.

Aristotle's use of the word *Mimesis* is different from that of Plato's. He has deepened and enriched its significance by looking at it from many sides in the light of Greek Art and Literature. He uses the word *Mimesis* in its various connotations such as re-enactment, impersonalisation or representation. In *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates that Mimesis or the act of imitation itself is a source of pleasure. He further maintains that poetry imitates – it imitates men in action and these men are either better or worse than the masses (comedy represents worse men and Tragedy, better men). Aristotle deals with *Mimesis* in a factual way and observes that men are naturally imitative; they enjoy imitation and learn by it. Aristotle, further, classifies different types of Poetry according to their respective modes of imitation. According to him, certain Art forms imitate by means of language alone, either in prose or verse. When this imitation is in verse, it may combine different meters to create a rhythm. Aristotle considers writers like Homer and Empedocles as

the best exponents of imitation in meter. He considers three differences that distinguish artistic imitation – the medium, the object and the manner. Earlier, Plato in *The Republic* had used the term *Mimesis* in the sense of unpersonalisation. He had argued that the poet continually 'impersonates' other people. Also according to Plato, it is futile and misleading pursuit because of the nature of reality and man's limited perception of it. Everything that exists in this world is an imperfect copy of an idea/ object that exists outside the world as one sees and understands it. The creation of poets and artists are mere copies of 'Ideal' reality – third hand distortion of Truth – valueless and potentially misleading. Though Aristotle uses the basic notion of imitation as in Plato, he counters certain notions of imitation. Aristotle in contrast thinks that imitation is a recreation of something that is better than reality.

Michael Davies, a translator and commentator of Aristotle, explains his views on Aristotle's theory of imitation. According to him, at first glance, *Mimesis* seems to be stylizing of reality in which the ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain exaggeration, the relationship of the imitation to the object it imitates being something like the relationship of dancing to walking. Imitation always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really no beginning or end has. *Mimesis* involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. Thus the more 'real' the imitation the more fraudulent it becomes. Aristotle does not discuss all types of art in his *Poetics*. He speaks only of Epic Poetry, Tragedy, Comedy, Dithyrambic Poetry and music along with their respective mimetic nature. Aristotle equates poetry with music while Plato had equated poetry with thinking. Aristotle is of the opinion that poetry and music have a deeper significance than painting which is concerned with what was actually happened and what may happen, not as in painting which cannot go deep into reality. He says that poet deals with human thoughts and passions as they always are. Idealization is one of the constituents of Aristotle's *Mimesis* and it is best reflected in his thoughts on Drama. He defines Drama as imitation of action and tragedy as falling from a higher to a lower state. Aristotle's theory of imitation is thus his refutation of Plato's chares on poetry. While Plato had mentioned that poetry is an imitation of shadow of shadows and hence thrice removed from the truth, Aristotle counters, saying that, Art imitates not the mere appearance of things, but the ideal reality embodied in the very object of the world.

Plato's approach to Poetry was strictly utilitarian; however *Mimesis* is probably most misleading of his approach. It is assumed that according to Plato, the content of a poem is important rather than form and technical qualities. And hence, Plato's approach to poetry is strictly authoritarian and in favour of his Republic, he was

ready to sacrifice art. Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not deal with *Mimesis* in a metaphysical sense rather has a realistic approach. He points out that the content of poetry is not everything; its effect is medicated by the manner of its imitation or representation of its form. And thus, Aristotle counters Plato's utilitarian and authoritarian approach towards poetry by considering the effect of imitation.

Aristotle's idea of imitation seems to be equivalent to 'producing' or 'creating', a true idea. Poetry, is thus, a creative art, whereas Plato had said that fairest things are done by nature and the lesser by Art. Aristotle says that, Art does not cheat the mind but provides an idea in a form which under normal circumstances cannot find adequate.

Aristotle also answers Plato's objection to the poetry's disregard for moral values. Plato had observed that though virtues are rewarded in poetry, vices are not necessarily punished as in a tragedy. Aristotle counters this point by stating that poetry deals with the ideal and hence what is exemplary in poetry is more important than its moral commitments.

Plato's view of Truth value is another issue contested in Poetics. Aristotle rebuffs Plato's charge that poetry is the mother of all lies. He reminds that poetry deals with 'what ought to be' rather than 'what is' or 'what was' and hence, it deals with the ideal truth.

Plato had condemned poetry for being emotional, having born out of a 'divine frenzy.' Aristotle counters this premise too and redeems poetry with his theory of *catharsis*. He argues that poetry, by exciting emotions such as pity and fear, channelizes them to provide psycho-moral purgation of the same. This purgation, he maintains, is better than suppressing them.

Thus, *Poetics* is largely Aristotle's debate with Plato. Aristotle counters Plato's utilitarian approach to Poety, concluding that the affect of imitation is to be considered rather than the content of the poetry. Although it is often said that Aristotle's account of *Mimesis* in *Poetics* is a critical response to Plato's exile of the poets in the Republic, the relationship between the two philosophers is somewhat more complicated and remains a matter of scholarly debate. Plato was Aristotle's teacher, and although he is never named in the treatise, his presence is unmistakable. Aristotle borrows a number of formulations from Plato and challenges his teacher's claims about the nature and effects of *Mimesis*, one of the main functions of poetry.

1.9 COMPARISON BETWEEN EPIC AND TRAGEDY

"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them"
-Aristotle, Nichomachea Ethics.

Poetics by Aristotle defines different kinds of poetry; it explains the structure of a good poem and considers poetry as a form of imitation. He defines poetry as a "medium of imitation" that tries to represent life through character, and action. Further, he classifies poetry into broad categories such as epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poem and some kinds of music. In one of the segments in *Poetics* epic poetry and tragedy are compared.

Major part of Poetics holds a discussion on tragedy. Aristotle says that tragedy evolves from the efforts of a poet to present men nobler or better than they are in real life. He observes:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action not of narrator, through pity and fear effecting proper catharsis of these emotions. (*Poetics)*

The main piece of Aristotle's *Poetics* is his examination of tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy, explains it constituent parts and compares it with epic. Aristotle indicates that the middle of tragedy is drama and not narrative. He says that tragedy "shows" rather than "tells". Aristotle also lays out six elements of tragedy: plot, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle.

Aristotle considers plot as a first principle and the most important feature of tragedy. He defines plot as the "arrangement of incidents". He implies that the plot is not just the story but the way incidents are presented to the audience. Further Aristotle adds that the good plot should have a beginning, middle and end. He also says that plot may be either simple or complex although the complex plot is better. According to him the simple plot has only a change of fortune (*catastrophe*) where as complex plot has both reversal (*peripeita*) and recognition (*Anagnorisis*).

The second element of tragedy that Aristotle discusses is, "characterization". The four significant points of character should be: the hero must be good and hence should manifest moral purpose in his speech, next , he should have propriety or manly valor, the hero must be true to life, and finally, the hero must be consistent. Another element of Aristotle's view on tragedy is on

'thought'. Thought is one of the causes of action and it covers mental activities from reasoning, perception and formulation of emotion. He further states that thought is expressed in speeches in a tragedy and is, therefore, closely linked to direction. "Diction' is another element of tragedy. It covers language and its use: the way in which a command, request, prayer or statement is expressed. Aristotle evokes the study of rhetoric in the context of diction and proposes an analysis of words, sentences, letters, syllables, inflection, and phrases. Further, he examines metaphors such as the f light and darkness in *'Oedipus Tyrranus'* and also the lyrical poetry as it is seen in choral odes. The last two elements of tragedy 'song and spectacle' are concerned with the production of the play. Though they are essential parts of the tragedy, the concern of the poem is less for them as compared to his concern for plot, character and thought. He adds that chorus should be regarded as one of the actors and even of great importance as the chorus has a unifying function in a tragedy.

Aristotle also explains the epic form in his *Poetics,* constantly comparing it with tragedy. He states that epic form has a single meter, a dramatic plot, unity and all other features of a tragedy. An epic does not portray a single action, but rather single period thus often characterizing many characters over the course of many events. Tragedy, he reminds in contrast, has a variety of meters befitting the emotions and characters

Epic poetry however, has the same subjects as tragedy has: simple, complex, ethical or pathetic. Also like tragedy it requires reversals, recognitions, scenes of sufferings and artistic thought and diction. Rather there are few differences between the epic and the tragedy in their themes and situations.

While pointing out the differences, Aristotle maintains that unlike tragedy, epic will not use song or spectacle to achieve its cathartic effect. Secondly, epic cannot be presented at a single setting, whereas tragedies are usually capable of being realized within a single view. While epic has a wide canvass with many characters and immense time frame, these elements are conditioned by the three unites in tragedy. Aristotle also points out that the mode of presentation in an epic is narration while that of a tragedy is action. Finally the heroic measure of epic poetry is hexameter whereas tragedy uses other forms of meter to achieve the rhythm of different characters' speech.

Moreover, Aristotle adds that the element of wonderful is difficult to accomplish in a tragedy than in an epic. The irrational on which the wonderful depends for its chief effects, has wider scope in epic poetry, because there the person acting is not seen.

Thus, Aristotle says that tragedy evolves from the efforts of the poet to present men as nobler as or better than they are in real life and epic too imitates noble men like in tragedy. However, epic, he says, has only one meter unlike tragedy which is written in variety of meters. Aristotle concludes *Poetics* with the observation that though epic has a high stature, the appeal of tragedy is greater as the action in tragedy is demonstrated and not narrated. He also says that tragedy possesses all the elements that the epic has while Epic has only four constituents – plot, character, thought and diction. Aristotle indicates that tragedy has spectacle and song as additional elements, which contribute to greater pleasure. He also argues that tragedy affects the spectator emotionally and strongly, being shorter in length. Aristotle rates tragedy a higher poetic form than epic. He points out that tragedy has all the elements of epic whereas epic does not have song and spectacle and hence, it falls short of the mimetic effect of tragedy.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Though *Poetics* is largely considered as Aristotle's views on imitation, tragedy and epic, it also inaugurates analytical criticism and comparative criticism. Aristotle opens up analytical criticism by studying drama in terms of its constituent parts. By comparing the formal and aesthetic features of epic and tragedy, he also opens up the possibilities in comparative criticism. Further, Aristotle counters effectively Plato's charges on poetry. However, *Poetics* is not just an intellectual debate with Plato. David Daiches observes how Aristotle elevates the place of *Poetics* in the history of criticism by touching upon issues like imitation, imagination and emotions:

One can fairly maintain that a whole view of the *value* of imaginative literature is implicit in Aristotle's discussion of the relation between poetry and history and the nature of literary probability. But he is not content with answering Plato's contention that art is but an imitation of an imitation, thrice removed from truth; he wishes also to answer specifically Plato's notion that art corrupts by nourishing the passions. His reply to this charge is simple and remarkable. Far from nourishing the passions, he asserts, it gives them harmless or even useful purgation. By exciting pity and fear in us, tragedy enables us to leave the theater "in calm of mind, all passion spent". (Daiches, p-39)

1.11 KEY TERMS

Mimesis, catharsis, plot, tragedy, epic, peripetia, anagnorisis, catastrophe, hamartia

1.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.I Define the following in the context of Aristotle's *Poetics*:
1. Plot
2. Catharsis
3. Reversal
4. Recognition
5. Character

QII. Answer the following:
1. Discuss Aristotle's views on tragedy as revealed in *Poetics*.
2. Explain how Aristotle argues that plot is the most integral element in a tragedy.
3. Consider Aristotle's views on poetry as imitation or a mimetic art.
4. What, according to Aristotle is the function of *catharsis* in tragedy? Discuss
5. How does Aristotle compare tragedy and epic? Which, according to him, has more merits and why?

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Unit -2

"PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE" – SAMUEL JOHNSON

Unit Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 About the Author

2.3 "The Preface to Shakespeare": An Overview

2.4 Conclusion

2.5 Key Terms

2.6 Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint the learners with Samuel Johnson's views on Shakespeare's art. This unit also proposes to enable students to appreciate both the merits and demerits of Shakespeare's writing.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In October 1765, Samuel Johnson wrote his "Preface to Shakespeare" which is held in high esteem due to his assessment of Shakespeare's writings in the spirit of a true critic. He highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of Shakespeare's works. This text is invaluable in that unlike other critics, who indiscriminatingly shower praises on Shakespeare, Johnson shows courage in pointing out flaws in the works of the immortal bard. Besides, the essay is also a great testimony of the neoclassical criticism.

2.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Johnson (18 September 1709) was an English writer who made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer. Born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, Johnson attended Pembroke College, Oxford and after working as a teacher, moved to London where he began to write for The Gentleman's Magazine. His early works include a biography, The Life of Richard Savage (biography) "London" and "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (poems), and Irene (play).

Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language was published in 1755. It had a far-reaching effect on Modern English and has been described as "one of the greatest single achievements of scholarship". His later works included essays, an influential annotated edition of "William Shakespeare's plays", and the widely read tale Rasselas. In 1763, he befriended James Boswell, with whom he later travelled to Scotland. Johnson described their travels in A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland. Towards the end of his life, he produced the massive and influential Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets, a collection of biographies and evaluations of 17th and 18th century poets. His Lives of the Poets series, is marked by various opinions on what would make a poetic work excellent. He believed that the best poetry relied on contemporary language, and he disliked the use of decorative or purposefully archaic language. Johnson was "arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history" He was also the subject of "the most famous single work of biographical art in the whole of literature": James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson

2.3 "THE PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE": AN OVERVIEW

In the second half of the eighteenth century, critics and poets continued to admit and admire the neo-classical principles. But at the same time, a reaction against some of its tenets had set in and slowly Romanticism in literature was emerging. Clearly discernible are the twin factors in artistic creation, unimpassioned reason on the one side, emotion and imagination on the other. While Dr. Johnson represented the persistence of classical dogma and was the spokesman of doctrinal classicism, in his "Preface to Shakespeare", he fearlessly broke the shackles of many a neo-classical rule. The "Preface" is the most precious part of Johnson's edition of Shakespeare. Approaching the dramatist from the standpoint of neo-classicism, he reveals the genius of Shakespeare. But, at the same time, he did not forget to put an end to the idolatry of Shakespeare, and rightfully, rejects the extremes of neo-classicism.

In his preface to his edition of the collected works of Shakespeare, Johnson claims that often past works are held in high esteem while the recent ones are ignored. When a person is no more, he tends to be honoured. This gives the feeling that one can only be praised years after he has written the work or when his work becomes antique. So the perception of talent gets associated with age. "Johnson tries", observes John Bailey, "by the test of time, Nature and universality and he finds Shakespeare supreme in all". According to Johnson, Shakespeare's plays have stood the

test of time. They have passed through variations of tastes and change of manners, and they have received new honour at every transmission from generation to generation. He has long outlived his own century. Johnson emphasizes that the plays of Shakespeare are "a faithful mirror of life". As a true neo-classicist, he extolled Shakespeare's greatness as a poet of nature and his acceptance of the neo-classical position on art as an imitation of general, universal human nature. He obeyed the Aristotlean principle that "art imitates nature and thus art was formed by experience". Johnson found that Shakespeare made nature predominate over accident; that he depicted the influence of the general passions and that he successfully presented life in its natural colours. According to Johnson, Shakespeare's characters are a faithful representation of humanity – "the genuine progeny of common humanity such as the world will always supply and observation will always find." He deals with passions and principles which are common to humanity. His characters are "universalized into the type whose actions and content may have their application to ordinary men and ordinary life". Johnson argues that Shakespeare's characters are true to type; they are universal, not purely idiosyncratic, but at the same time, they are individuals. Each one of his characters is distinct from others. The speech of one character cannot be placed in the mouth of the other. Johnson, further, states that Shakespeare's characters are not exaggerated. They have neither unexplained excellence nor depressing depravity. He has "no heroes", but only human beings. They act and think in the same way as the readers would act and think under similar circumstances. Even when the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is "level with life". Shakespeare, thus, familiarizes the wonderful and approximates the remote, observes Johnson.

However, from his neo-classical bias, Johnson boldly sways to the romantic notions. He brushes aside the stricter neo-classical notions of "propriety with respect to character". Johnson criticizes as "petty cavils of petty minds", Rhymer's accusation that Shakespeare's Roman Senator, Menanius in *Corialanus* is not sufficiently Roman and Voltaire's criticism that Shakespeare violated 'decorum', when he made Claudius in *Hamlet* a drunkard. Johnson observes that Shakespeare, here, "makes nature predominant over accident". Though his story required Romans or kings, he thinks only of men. Johnson attacks decorum of the neo-classical school with the neo-classical principle of truth to general nature.

While the contemporary strict Neo-classical criticism condemned the mingling of the tragic and the comic, Johnson uses the very fundamental principle of limitation of general human nature against the school. The ancient dramatists selected the two aspects of life and portrayed it dramatically, calling one a comedy and the

other a tragedy. Since then, there grew a distinction which introduced an artificial breaking up of the unity of life. Shakespeare refused to accept the artificial division and hence, introduced both the serious and the comic into the same play just as they are found in actual life. So, Johnson observes that Shakespearean plays are much closer to life than a pure tragedy or comedy. In real life, there is mingling of good and evil, joy and sorrow, tears and smiles, and so in mixing tragedy and comedy, Shakespeare, justly, holds a mirror to nature. Tragi-comedy may be against rules, says Johnson, but "there is always an appeal open from criticism to Nature." It is truth to Nature or life that Johnson demands, not truth to the rules of critical theory. Moreover, tragic-comedy being nearer to life combines within itself the pleasure and instruction of both tragedy and comedy. Johnson defends such mingling on the fundamentally neo-classic ground that the imitation of general human nature not only permits but demands it. Shakespeare's plays, combining comedy and tragedy, show real human nature which "partakes of joy and sorrow."

Moreover, Shakespeare's use of tragicomedy does not weaken the effect of a tragedy, because it does not interrupt the progress of passions. In fact, Shakespeare knew that pleasure consisted in variety and continued melancholy or grief is often not pleasing. Whether Shakespeare wrote tragedies, comedies or histories, he always fascinates us: "As he commands us, we laugh, or mourn or sit silent with quiet satisfaction in tranquillity without indifference". Moreover, the language that Shakespeare uses for his dialogue is above grossness and below refinement. It is the "real language of men", as Wordsworth would describe it.

Further, Johnson defends, vehemently, Shakespeare's violation of the Unities. The defence is a fine exposition of dramatic illusion and a bold criticism of the neo-classical doctrine of verisimilitude. Johnson begins the defence by exempting Shakespeare's historical plays from his censure, as they are neither tragedies nor comedies and hence, are not subject to these rules. The only unity he needs to maintain in his histories is the consistency and naturalness in his characters and this he does so faithfully. In his other works, he has well maintained the unity of action. His plots have the variety and complexity of nature, but have a beginning, middle and an end, and one event is logically connected with another, and the plot makes gradual advancement towards the denouement.

Shakespeare shows no regard for the Unities of Time and Place**,** and according to Johnson, these have troubled the poet more than it has pleased his audience. The observance of these unities is considered necessary to provide credibility to the drama. But, any fiction can never be real, and the audience knows this. If a

spectator can imagine the stage to be Alexandria and the actors to be Antony and Cleopatra, he can surely imagine much more. Drama is a delusion, and delusion has no limits. Therefore, there is no absurdity in showing different actions in different places. With regard to the Unity of Time, Shakespeare says that a drama imitates successive actions, and just as they may be represented at successive places, so also they may be represented at different period, separated by several days. The only condition is that the events must be connected with each other.

Johnson, further, says that drama moves us not because we think it is real, but because it makes us feel that the evils represented may happen to ourselves. Imitations produce pleasure or pain, not because they are mistaken for reality, but because they bring realities to mind. The final verdict of Johnson is that "Unities of Time and Place are not essential to a just drama though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure; they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction". The rules may be against Johnson for defending Shakespeare's violation of the laws, but he justifies Shakespeare on grounds of nearness to life and nature.

While speaking of the weaknesses of Shakespeare, we have in Johnson the Neo-classicist and the moralist. He accuses Shakespeare with lacking in morality, for he sacrifices virtue to convenience. Johnson observes that there is no poetic justice in his plays and that he cannot be excused for the barbarity of his age, for justice is a virtue independent of time and place. Johnson maintains that it is the duty of a writer to make the world better. Another defect that Johnson points out is Shakespeare's loosely constructed plots and neglecting opportunities to instruct. Further, Johnson lists out the flaws in Shakespeare. According to him, there are many faults of chronology and anachronisms in his play. His jokes are often gross and licentious. Narration, in his dramas, is often tedious as there is much pomp of diction and circumlocution. His set speeches are cold and weak. They are often verbose and too large for thought. Trivial ideas are clothed in sonorous epithets. He has an irresistible fascination for puns and quibbles for which he sacrifices reason, propriety and truth. He often fails at moments of great excellence. When he could achieve excellence of tenderness or pathos and inspire the cathartic feelings of pity and terror, he lets himself be diverted by some idle conceit and spoils the effect of his tragic scenes.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Dr. Johnson studies and evaluates the works of Shakespeare, as he claims himself, without "envious malignity or

superstitious reveration. He is a neo-classical critic in maintaining that art is imitation. In his "Preface to Shakespeare", he maintains that a work of art like a play should be "a just representation of human nature" and Shakespeare is above all writers the poet of nature. However, with the independence of a Romantic critic, Johnson brushes aside the neo-classical notion of 'propriety' with respect to character and also defends Shakespeare's refusal to uphold the principle of Triple Unities and the mingling of tragedy and comedy.

2.5 KEY TERMS

Characterization, Dialogue, Tragedy, Comedy, Tragi-comedy, Neoclassicism

2.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

QI Say whether the following sentences are True or False
1. Some of Shakespeare's plots are loosely constructed and have improbable endings.
2. Shakespeare has been blamed by Johnson for following the unities of time and place.
3. The mingled dramas of Shakespeare fulfill the proper function of drama.
4. Shakespeare presents traits particular to certain individuals or places or times rather than present general nature of characters.
5. Shakespeare sacrifices virtue to convenience.

Q II Define the following terms:
1. Comedy
2. Tragedy
3. Characterization
4. Dialogue
5. Tragi-comedy

Q III Attempt the following:
1. How does Dr. Johnson highlight Shakespeare's merit in his essay, "Preface to Shakespeare"?
2. How does Dr. Johnson critically evaluate the demerits of Shakespeare's works?
3. How does Johnson defend Shakespeare's mixing of tragic and comic elements?

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Unit -3

BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA (CHAPTER XVII AND CHAPTER XVIII) - SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Unit structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction to romantic Criticism

3.2 Introduction to S.T. Coleridge

3.3 An Overview *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter XVII and Chapter XVIII): Coleridge's Views on the Use of Meter in Poetry.

3.4 Conclusion

3.5 Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to consider the Coleridge's scientific approach towards the process of poetic creation in his pivotal essay "Biographia Literaria", which also serves to be a more logical reply to Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads". Apart from enlightening students with the gist of this significant work by Coleridge, this unit emphasizes on Coleridge's views about use of meter in the process of poetic creation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO ROMANTIC CRITICISM

Romanticism of the 19th century was a continental movement and English Romantic Revival can be considered as a part of European Romanticism. The distinction between the Romantic and the Classical was first explained by Schlegel. The writings of Rousseau and William Godwin also shaped the growth of English Romanticism. Concepts such as truth, nature, God and creativity were redefined in the Romantic Era. The domain of literary criticism too underwent changes so as to accommodate new approaches to art and literature.

Romantic Criticism was shaped by the experience of the French Revolution and hence one of its major concerns was how literature should relate to society. This question weighed heavily with William Wordsworth, whose "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" carry

the first substantial statements of Romantic Critical principles. Wordsworth spoke about the language of poetry and he maintained that the language of poetry should be democratized. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, on the other hand, was widely read in contemporary German philosophy. His prose writings were conditioned by the writings of Emanuel Kant, Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling. Coleridge was involved, in his *Biographia Literaria* to establish the principles of writing. He also made an attempt to define imagination and his interest in the power of imagination marked an important aspect of Romantic critical thinking. Reality, imagination, fancy and aesthetics were the key concepts put in circulation by Romantic Criticism.

English poets like William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge and P.B. Shelley gave memorable expressions to the Romantic mindset developed by their German contemporaries. They underscored in their writings the primacy of feeling, love and pleasure, and imagination over reason. They were also convinced of the spiritual superiority of nature's organic forms over mechanical ingenuity; and of the ability of art to restore lost harmony between the individual and nature.

Romantic Criticism especially that of Wordsworth, made certain proclamations about the nature and function of poetry. Wordsworth's famous statement of poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings posited a different view of poetry than was accepted at that time. Wordsworth shifted the centre of attention from the work as a reflection or imitation of reality to the artist. For the first time, poetry was considered an expressive rather than mimetic art. Additionally, music replaced painting as the art form considered most like poetry. In addition to the significance of poet's personality in poetry, romantic critics formulated a few aesthetic theories. Wordsworth's notion of poetic language in "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" and Coleridge's idea of meter in *Biographia Literaria* are good examples of such theories. However, Coleridge's critical theory differed widely from that of Wordsworth in that they were heavily grounded in theology. Further, Coleridge was more systematic and analytical in his critical writings.

3.2 INTRODUCTION TO S.T. COLERIDGE

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose literary fame rest largely on his identity as a romantic poet, was also a noteworthy critic of his time. His *Biographia Literaria* presents some interesting and insightful analysis of the process of creativity, poetic language, imagination and the significance of meter in poetry. Compared to William Wordsworth, Coleridge appears to be more scientific in his approach to the theory of creativity. While Wordsworth appreciates

the spontaneity and simplicity in the process of creativity, Coleridge explains the complex processes of sense-perceptions and the image making. His critical theory also tries to plug the logical gaps in Wordsworth's theory of poetry. Most importantly, Coleridge explains the difference between the ordinary and poetic language by justifying the features of poetic composition.

I. A. Richards considers Coleridge as a forerunner of semantics and Rene Wellek is of the opinion that Coleridge's theory of imagination provides an important link between German Transcendentalism and English Romanticism.

Coleridge's literary criticism, unlike neoclassical criticism is neither legislative nor judicial. He proposes an impressionistic-romantic approach to literary criticism, hinting fresh revaluations of old English literary masters. He was also probably the first English critic to explore the psychology of the poet while studying the process of poetic creation and the principles of creative mental activity. His greatest contribution to literary criticism is his theory of imagination. This theory makes all previous discussions on imagination look superficial and unscientific. Apart from making a distinction between imagination and fancy, this theory also differentiates between primary and secondary imagination. The theory also revolutionizes the concept of artistic imitation. Coleridge tries to establish the point that poetic imitation is neither a slavish copy of nature nor is it something entirely different from nature. For him, poetry is not imitation but creation, though the creation is based on the sensations and impressions received from the external world.

3.3 AN OVERVIEW *BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA* (CHAPTER XVII AND CHAPTER XVIII): COLERIDGE'S VIEWS ON POETIC LANGUAGE AND THE USE OF METER IN POETRY.

Coleridge's views on meter in poetry are largely reflected in chapters XVII and XVIII of *Biographia Literaria*. These chapters, besides justifying the use of meter, also explain the origin and effects of meter. Chapter XVIII concludes with Coleridge's argument that poetry is different from prose in its order, figurative use of language and rhythm.

Coleridge believes that poetry is a matter of ordering or succession of images, sentences and sounds. Based on this premise, he examines the validity of Wordsworth's statement – "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition". Coleridge says that prose itself differs from place to place and person to person. For

instance, written language is different from the language of conversation. Hence he argues that one can assume that there must be greater difference between ordnance of poetry and that of prose.

Secondly Coleridge observes that language provides scope for individuation. This would indicate that each writer would prefer certain types of words, sentences and figures of speech. Poetry, Coleridge believes, provides more scope for this individuation and hence its language ought to be different from the prose.

Coleridge examines the origin of meter and explains that it can be considered as an effort to check the workings of emotions. Though he considers that meter creates a state of increased excitement for the reader, he believes that it provides some control over the passions for the writer. According to Coleridge, meter is an attempt to blend delight with emotions. Further, he considers meter as a voluntary act which takes some control over passion. He says that a poem written in meter combines spontaneous impulse with voluntary purpose. To prove this point, Coleridge quotes from Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale* and shows how the meter used in the dialogue makes it a pleasurable excitement.

Subsequently, Coleridge analyses the effects of meter. Firstly, he observes that meter increases the vivacity of natural feelings. Secondly, he points out that meter produces continued excitement of surprise. Thirdly, he says that meter creates a medicated atmosphere in poetry. Countering Wordsworth's statement about meter that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition, Coleridge states that meter has a pleasurable purpose. To prove this point, Coleridge analyses Wordsworth's poem, "Children in the Wood" and shows that Wordsworth has used an alliterative meter in this poem to elevate the emotions and to create a pleasing auditory pattern. Further, Coleridge argues that meter gives a poem a better chance of immortality. He points out that Wordsworth's poems like "Simon Lee" and "Alice Fell" would have been moral essays had they been written in prose. Coleridge also believes that meter stimulates attention.

Coleridge observes that meter can capture low and rustic life as Wordsworth would prefer. He says that a poem can remain colloquial and yet can be written in figurative language.

Like Aristotle, Coleridge argues that different human emotions like love, fear, rage and jealousy can be expressed in different meters. Hence, he believes that these meters would demand a different use of language in poetry. Coleridge is also of the opinion that human beings like unity by harmonious adjustment

i.e. the assimilation of the essential parts to the whole. Meter, he says, is an example of this adjustment.

Finally, Coleridge observes that the debate on whether to have meter or not should be settled on the basis of the practice of the poets. He points out that great poets like Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth have used meter and figures of speech to make a difference from ordinary prose. He proves this point by re-assessing Wordsworth's criticism of Gray's sonnet and points out that the lines of the sonnet which Wordsworth liked are different from ordinary prose, as they have metaphors and similes, meters and alliteration. Coleridge concludes the chapter by re-working Wordsworth' s statement on language of poetry and gives his verdict – "there may be, is and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." What Coleridge implies is that a good poem has a rhythm, figures of speech and unique style which make it different from ordinary conversation.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Eventually Coleridge through his insightful and logically sound chapters in Biographia Literaria asserts that there is huge difference between the language of ordinary prose and that of poetic composition; and this difference gets reflected with the use of meter and figures of speech in poems. Coleridge proves this by illustrating how Wordsworth himself liked those compositions which are highly figurative and metrically sound and not just in the ordinary language of prose.

3.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.I State whether the following statements are true or false:
1. According to Coleridge, there is no difference between the language of ordinary prose and that of poetic composition.

2. Coleridge justifies his views about the use of meter by illustrating the great poets like Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth himself.

3. Meter, according to Coleridge, adds vivacity to a poem.

QII. Answer the following:
1. Discuss how Wordsworth and Coleridge perceive poetic diction?
2. Explain how romantic critics place imagination at the heart of the creative process.

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Unit -4

"A DEFENCE OF POETRY" –
Percy Bysshe Shelley

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this essay is to sensitize students to the perception of poetry among the Romantic poets and to enable them to understand how they defend poetry from all accusations levelled against it. The essay also intends to create in students an appreciation for Shelley's views on Poetry.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The "Defence of Poetry" is considered as an important instance of Shelley's prose writings. While his lyrical poetry does provide an insight into his imagination, this essay supplements this picture and gives us a glimpse of his intellect as well. The essay was originally written in 1821 as a response to Thomas Love Peacock's "Four Ages of Poetry", which wittily argued that society was now sufficiently advanced to dispense with poetry and that a poet was no more than 'a semi-barbarian in a civilized community'. Shelley's essay stands out as one of the most eloquent and inspiring assertions of the "ideal nature and essential value of poetry." It was first published posthumously in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*.

4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was born at Field Place near Horsham. He attended Eton College from 1804to 1810, and then went on to Oxford University. At university, Shelley was influenced by radical writings of Tom Paine and William Godwin and began writing radical articles himself. He wrote articles defending Daniel Isaac Eaton, a bookseller charged with selling books by Tom Paine and the much persecuted Radical publisher, Richard Carlile.

Shelley also wrote the Gothic *Zastrozzi* (1810) and "The Necessity of Atheism" (1811), a pamphlet that attacked the idea of compulsory Christianity, as a result of which he was expelled from Oxford University. In course of time, he wrote many more radical pamphlets like A Declaration of Rights, on the subject of the French Revolution, *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the United Kingdom* to ring in electoral reforms and to bring improvements in working class education. articles for *The Examiner* on political subjects. His long poem Queen Mab, celebrating the merits of republicanism, atheism, vegetarianism and free love, was published by Leigh Hunt. Some of his famous poems like 'Ozymandias'(1818), 'The Masque of Anarchy' (1819), 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820), 'The Revolt of Islam' and 'Prometheus Unbound' (1820) proved to be an influence on later poets like Robert Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Lord Alfred Tennyson, and William Butler Yeats.He also wrote a tragedy *The Cenci* and many other works including *Men of England* and an elegy for John Keats, "Adonais" (1821). In 1822 Shelley, moved to Italy with Leigh Hunt and Lord Byron where they published the journal The Liberal. By publishing it in Italy the three men remained free from prosecution by the British authorities. The first edition of *The Liberal* sold 4,000 copies. Soon after its publication, Percy Bysshe Shelley was lost at sea on 8th July, 1822.

4.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" is unusual as compared to similarly titled "defenses" of poetry. Shelley's essay contains no rules for poetry, or aesthetic judgments of his contemporaries. Instead, Shelley's philosophical assumptions about poets and poetry can be read as a sort of primer for the Romantic movement in general. In this essay, written a year before his death, Shelley addresses "The Four Ages of Poetry," a witty magazine piece by his friend, Thomas Love Peacock. Peacock's work teases and jokes through its definitions and conclusions, specifically that poetry has become valueless and redundant in an age of science and

technology, and that intelligent people should not waste their time in literary pursuits and should instead put their intelligence to good use. Shelley refutes Peacock's arguments in his "Defence of Poetry." He focuses on the role of poetry and the poet in society and explains why he considers poets to be incredible, divine, super-human beings on whom all of civilization and human existence relies. Shelley, in this essay provides his criticism of reason and insists that imagination is that which makes poets productive characters. Thus, this essay revolves around Shelley's argument that imagination is superior to reason. Thereafter, Shelley proceeds to establish the nature of the poet.

4.3.1 Reason versus Imagination

At the beginning of the essay, Shelley compares the human mind to an aeolian lyre (or harp). He argues that the mind like a lyre produces conscious thought (the melody) partly in response to external impetuses like the wind and partly in response to internal impressions derived from transcendental sources. Shelley calls the part of our mind which is shaped by external impressions and which is responsible for conscious thought as reason. It is reason which brings in a sense of harmony to our mind and to our conscious thoughts.

Shelley says that when reason creates conscious thought, it also provides a sequence of ideas. But, it is the Imagination in the human mind that allows forming of connections, links, associations and combinations between the ideas. Shelley claims that since both the reason and the Imagination are faculties or functions of the mind, found in each human being, they have a different set of functions to perform. According to him, while reason attempts to perceive the truth through logical processes and argumentation and resorts to dissecting issues and splitting them into their constitutive elements, the Imagination is responsible for a higher level of thought than the reason and sees beyond the physical world to the essences or ideal forms of which physical phenomena, in the Platonist scheme of things, are merely imperfect replicas. The Imagination is, thus, concerned with conceptualizing the unification of phenomena and expressing them in the form of logical discourses like scientific treatises. Reason is able to differentiate between issues while Imagination tries to bring seemingly different and irreconcilable issues together on the basis of some underlying sameness and focuses on discerning patterns. Thus, the imagination is superior to reason as it makes use of reason and builds upon it, thereby surpassing it.

4.3.2 Production of Poetry

Shelley argues that knowledge is subjective and each individual perceives it differently. The mind creates knowledge on the basis of its observation of things. Thus it is capable of making

either a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven. Whatever impression we gather from the surroundings influences us but Shelley contends that poetry enables us to break free from fixed notions that we may have about the incident. Poetry tends to either provide an ornamented account of events or to reveal life's innermost secrets but in both cases, it invariably creates a new individuality within us, which is able to view the anomalies in the everyday world and glimpse the reality of our existence. Poetry recreates that aspect of the world that is lost to us as it is repeatedly veiled by more mundane things which occupy the centre stage of life. Shelley argues that it is human ability to accumulate wisdom-moral, political and historical, and to load his mental faculties with all sorts of scientific and economical knowledge that jams his creative faculty. It is therefore, that his creative faculty is unable to imagine the things that are known or to act on those impulses and in turn is not capable of generating any poetry. So although all the sciences have helped man to establish his supremacy over the outer world, the failure of his poetic faculty renders him vulnerable to being trapped in the smaller mental world of his own making.

Shelley claims that the poetic ability helps man in two ways. Firstly, it helps generate new materials of knowledge, power and pleasure and secondly, it instills a desire to rearrange them in attractive patterns. The Imagination is the most important mental faculty, in Shelley's view, responsible for composing a poem. So, the creative process is not one that can be consciously controlled as unlike reasoning, it cannot be controlled by desire. Shelley compares the mind which is in the act of creating to a fading coal being influenced by some invisible power within the coal transforming it into a diamond. He says that another example of a simillar phenomenon is seen in flowers wherein it gets its colour from within itself and later follows its own pattern of growth and fading. The mind, therefore, is unable to guess when its creative juices will flow or ebb.

Poetry is the product of inspiration, coming from within and over which the conscious portion of our mind (or reason) has little control. Poets simply have to follow the dictates of this superior power within their souls. He concludes that it is, therefore, a mistake to presume that wonderful poetry is created as a result of hard work or taught lessons. Shelley claims that the only things that a poet is conscious of are flitting thoughts and feelings with respect to particular places or persons arising and subsiding unbidden from the recesses of the mind creating unparalleled pleasure. It is as if a greater power intercedes on man's behalf and vanishes leaving behind traces as those created by the wind on the sand in the sea shore. But, for this to happen, the poet must possess a high degree of literary sensitivity and imagination power.

Shelley claims that poets have the power to envision an alternative world, and so they cannot be said to be mere writers. On the contrary, they may be said to be the ones who make laws for the civil society or they may be called teachers who are close enough to the beautiful and the true to become agencies of religion. To Shelley, poets are like legislators and prophets who are able to not only look beyond the apparent present and decide the laws for arranging them systematically, but also glimpse the future in the present and put forth their insightful thoughts.

4.3.3 Nature of Poetry

Having defined the poet, Shelley turns his attention to comprehending the nature of poetry. Shelley argues that poetry is the "expression of the imagination" of the poet. He admits that reason evidently plays a part too. At least at one level, poetry makes use of media like words and is an imitation of human actions and behaviour. Poetry is in short, to some degree at least, a mirror held up to the physical world. These are all functions of the reason. However, poetry does more than this: poets being in direct communication with the creator use their imagination to convey a world order that is invincible. Poetry is, from this point of view, the main site where things lying undiscovered find expression to present timeless music. Poetry exposes the reality of life threadbare. It makes the familiar unfamiliar by presenting the stark reality. Poetic devices enable comparing ordinary things to true images rendering them extraordinary. Poets, Shelley says, are in direct connection to both man and nature and are able to gauge the depth of human nature. Shelley, accordingly, ranks literature in general, and poetry in particular, above all other art forms like the visual arts, the plastic arts (sculpture), or dance. This is because poetry is the product of imagination in combination with usage of metrical language in unusual ways. By virtue of the nature of language, poetry not only represents the actions and passions locked within individuals, but also plays with different modes of expression and thus, proves to be superior to other art forms.

Although both prose and poetry make use of language, Shelley proposes that the status of poetry is above that of prose fiction. He says that the use of language in prose is limited whereas that in poetry is not. He further clarifies that the difference lies not merely in the fact that one is written in verse while the other is not. But, in that prose merely lists detached facts connected on the basis of time, place, circumstance, cause and effect while poetry regenerates and reconstitutes them just like the creator. Besides, where prose fiction applies only to a definite period of time, and to certain combination of events which may never recur again, poetry is universal, and contains within itself a bit of every possible kind of motive or action seen reflected in human nature. Moreover, prose fiction is nothing more than a narration of particular facts which

tends to distort the beautiful, poetry creates beauty in that which is originally not.

Poetry, Shelley famously asserts, is the "record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" and it immortalizes all that is incredible in its existence or beauty besides capturing the essence of fleeting moments of life in words for the pleasure of mankind. It "redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man" (527) because of its ability to render everything in its purview beautiful. Shelley also stresses that, because of their subject matter, the highest forms of poetry are not easily fathomable. They are, in fact, infinitely suggestive and evocative in a way that makes it very difficult to pinpoint meaning precisely.

4.3.5 Function of Poetry

Shelley finally proceeds to discuss the functions of poetry. He claims that while the imagination is able to generate delight, reason has utility value that is equivalent to pleasure. The universal or permanent pleasure "strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense" (525) while the transitory pleasure merely prevents the persisting base animal nature in man from surfacing. Poets seek to produce pleasure as pleasure is the true utility of poetry. So, even those in society who indulge in the pursuit of limited pleasure are following the footsteps of poets.

Shelley also responds to the accusation that poetry is immoral and argues that the accusation is based on a misconception regarding the way in which poetry enhances man's moral outlook. The pleasure generated by poetry is far different from that created by tragedy. Shelley claims that while tragedy rings in sorrow, poetry brings delight along with wisdom. Besides, poetry in its divine manner rises above propagating the doctrine of hate and subjugation and allows the mind to receive many thoughts which were previously not grasped and thereby reveals the true beauty by making the familiar unfamiliar. According to Shelley, love is the greatest of morals which promotes collaboration with beauty in another's thought and action. He says that if a man is good, he must put himself in the place of others and experience their pains and pleasures. But, this requires imagination and it is poetry that moulds imagination by providing exercise to strengthen this faculty. So, Shelley advises that, there is no need to moralize in poetry as a poet's morals are decided by his place and time and it may not be universal. But, poetry itself helps overcome unbecoming desires and paves the way for emotions like love, patriotism and friendship. Poetry successfully arouses once experienced but presently latent feelings and makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world. Poetry, Shelley continues, turns all things to loveliness. It exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty

to that which is most deformed. It marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change and subdues to union under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things. It revives glimpses of divinity in man with its Midas touch.

Shelley also argues that if literature has been instrumental in trying to bring about civil and religious liberty in present times, poetry appropriately complements the function of literature. He argues that while it is possible to comprehend the loss in terms of moral and intellectual growth if philosophers like Locke and Voltaire had never been, one cannot even begin to gauge the impact on the human mind of the absence of poets of the stature of Shakespeare. Perhaps, the human mind would fail to appreciate the difference between good and bad and would be unable to use his analytical reasoning ability to decipher the abnormal trends in society.

4.4 CONCLUSION

"A Defence of Poetry" can be considered as a counterpoint to Coleridge's ideas about reason and imagination in that this essay defends the poetic imagination. Here Shelley emphasizes that both the poet and poetry have an important place in society. It is poetry which adds charm to the world. It is not concerned with just an aesthetic function but takes in its stride a more superior role of inculcating moral judgement. Shelley argues that poetry brings about moral good. Poetry, Shelley believes, exercises and expands the imagination which brings about sympathy, compassion, love, and the ability to put oneself in the position of another person. Poetry makes its effect felt on every realm of life. So, the role of neither, the poet or poetry can be derided. In fact, he suggests that the world can survive without philosophers but not without poets.

Shelley, more than other English poets of the early nineteenth century, believed in the connection between beauty and goodness, and in the power of art's sensual pleasures to improve society. While Byron's prose was marked with instances of amoral sensuousness and controversial rebelliousness and Keats' works revealed his belief in beauty and aesthetics for their own sake, Shelley's poetry reflect moral optimism. He firmly believes that poetry makes people and society *better*. Through his poetry he hoped to influence his readers sensuously, spiritually, and morally, all at the same time.

4.5 KEY TERMS

- Imagination, Reasoning, Knowledge, Pleasure

4.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1 True or False
1. According to Shelley, prose is superior to poetry.
2. Poetry mirrors the physical world.
3. Shelley's essay contains rules of poetry.
4. The mind has the power to switch on and off its creative juices.
5. Poets can create an alternate world.

Q2 Define the following terms:
1. Imagination
2. Reasoning
3. Poetry
4. Pleasure
5. Knowledge

Q3 Attempt the following:
1. What does Shelley argue in favour of- Reason or Imagination? Explain your answer on the basis of your study of his essay.
2. Discuss the nature and functions of poetry as envisaged by Shelley in his essay.
3. How does Shelley define the poet's role in society?

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Unit -5

"THE THEORY OF RASA" – S.N.Dasgupta

Unit Structure

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

5.2 About the Author

5.3 Introduction to the text

5.4 Conclusion

5.5 Key Terms

5.6 Check Your Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The basic aim of this unit is to familiarize the student with the Rasa theory. It will also try to elucidate certain important terms used in S.N.Dasgupta's essay and contextualize the essay to Indian aesthetics.

5.1 Introduction

The ancient Sanskrit Acharyas understood poetry as a verbal complex, profoundly emotive and they explained poetry on the basis of Rasa Theory. Rasa siddhanta is an affective theory. Though it is Bharata who is credited with having originated the rasa theory, it was Abhinava Gupta who developed it into a systematic poetic principle.

Although the concept of rasa is fundamental to many forms of Indian art including dance, music, musical theatre, cinema and literature, the treatment, interpretation, usage and actual performance of a particular rasa differs greatly between different styles and schools of abhinaya, and there exist huge regional differences too even within one style.

S.N.Dasgupta attempts to explain the place of this theory in Indian poetics. He throws light on the different types of Rasas and traces its development across ages.

5.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Surendranath Dasgupta (1885-1952) was an Indian philosopher who wrote the scholarly work *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 vol. (1922–55). Dasgupta received master's degrees in Sanskrit and philosophy from Sanskrit College in Calcutta. During the early 1920s, he travelled to England, where he earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Cambridge. His other major works include *Yoga as Philosophy and Religion* (1924) and *Indian Idealism* (1933). His philosophical system synthesized aspects of Vedantic literature, Indian Jainism (particularly its mysticism), the British and American school of new realism, and the theory of emergent evolution.

Dasgupta was the Principal at Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta and King George V. He also served as a Professor of Mental and Moral Science, at the Calcutta University. He represented India at the International Congress of Religion in London in 1936 and in Paris in 1939.

5.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

S. N. Dasgupta's essay, "The Theory of Rasa," is an interpretation of the Rasa Theory and also a commentary on different Sanskrit critics who have explained Rasa. What Dasgupta does in this essay is to define Rasa and to explain the psychological process which combines emotions, its physical expressions and the setting which evokes Rasa.

5.3.1 Notion of Rasa Theory in Sanskrit Poetics
T he Theory of Rasa has been central to Indian aesthetics or Sanskrit poetics which was developed around six hundred AD. Rasa Theory is generally considered as an explanatory formula for the aesthetic experience of Indian Drama and Literature and Bharata's *Natyashastra* is considered as the source of this theory.

In Indian aesthetics Rasa refers to the emotional or aesthetic experience crafted into the work by the writer and relished by a sensitive and responsive spectator or sahrdaya, one with a positive taste and mind. Bharata states that Rasa are created by Bhavas or emotions. He also maintains that a Rasa is developed out of a permanent mood which is also known as Sthayi Bhava. However, this development results from interplay of emotions and emotional conditions which are called Bhavas and Vibhavas.

5.3.2 Manifestation of Rasa in Sanskrit Classics

Prof. Dasgupta opens the essay by explaining that the completion of a Rasa depends on the right blend of Vibhava, Anubhava and Vyabhichari bhava. Further, he interprets and explains these three terms in the context of the Bharata's writing. Dasgupta explains Vibhava into two – Alambana and Uddipana. Alambana Vibhava indicates the person or persons with reference to whom the emotion is manifested in an art form. For instance, in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala,* the emotion of love or Rati is manifested by Dushyanth and Shakuntala who becomes the Alambana Vibhava. Uddipana Vibhava is the term used to indicate the circumstances which excite the emotion. These circumstances may include the setting, the weather, the nature, sounds and the time of the day. For instance, in *Shakuntala*, beautiful scenery of Ashram including the greenery, the fawns, the river, flowers and the easy lifestyle induce love in Dushyanth and Shakuntala, making the Uddipana Vibhavas. Dasgupta explains Anubhava as the bodily expressions by which the emotion is articulated. For instance, in *Shakuntala*, the heroine's glances smiles and her coyness may indicate the physical expressions of love. Vyabhichari bhavas are a series of diverse emotions that feed the dominant emotion. For instance, in *Shakuntala*, when Shakuntala is rejected by Dushyant, she drowns in the dominant feeling of sorrow or shok. However, in her interactions with Dushyant, she weeps, screams and finally faints, showing the range of Vyabhichari bhavas and the corresponding bodily expressions to feed the dominant emotion of sorrow. Similarly, it is possible to see in a play or a cinema, a beloved waiting for her lover, experiencing the dominant emotion of love but also showing impatience, anxiety, jealousy and remembrance to make the emotion of love very realistic.

5.3.3 Rasa: Different Associations

Prof. Dasgupta considers Vibhavas as the causes or karma of Rasa. He considers Anubhava as the effects following the rise of the emotion.

It is also necessary to consider the primary Rasas proposed by Bharata. These Rasas are also associated with certain colours and deities. SrIngar (love), Hasya (mirth), Raudra (Fury), Karuna (sympathy), Bibhasta (disgust), Bhayanak (horror), Vira (heroic), Athbhut (surprise) are these Rasas. The ninth Rasa is considered more stable and it is Santh (tranquility/peace). *Natyashastra* also provides eight bhavas or emotions which correspond to these eight Rasas. These emotions are Rati, Hasya, Krodha, Bhay, Jugupsa, Vismay, Utsaha, Shok.

In addition, *Natyashastra* explains the effects of the thirty three Sanchari bhavas which are crossing feelings, additional to the permanent moods and Vyabhichari bhavas or the transcient emotions which arise in the course of maintaining and developing the basic mood. Bharata also talks about the expression of emotions, Anubhavas such as blushing or perspiration. A significant point in *Natyashastra* is the qualification of a worthy spectator who is also described as 'rasajna' for whom Rasaanubhava or the experience of Rasa his understanding of Vibhavas and Vyabhichari bhavas is through Anubhavas or acting, gestures, physical expressions.

5.3.4 Evolution of Rasa Theory

Prof. Dasgupta also makes a quick historical survey of the evolution of Rasa Theory with reference to critics such as Abhinava Gupta, Mammata, Bhatta Lollata, Bhatta Nayaka and Bhatta Tauta. In this process, he appreciates the efforts of these critics as aesthetic psychologists who could explain the link between simulated emotions of the actors and the feelings of the spectators. He also points out that an emotion cannot be called Rasa unless it is presented through the medium of art and aesthetically excited. For instance, he argues that if a man falls in love with a woman, he may experience the emotion of love or rati but he need not experience Sringar Rasa. Dasgupta claims that Rasa is an emotion excited by artistic circumstances and does not exist in real life.

Dasgupta also maintains that the Alankara Critics or the critics who focused on techniques and forms had a problem with Rasa Theory because they could not explain how dominant emotions could be aroused by artistic means. However, he appreciates critics like Mammata and Samkuka for considering Vibhavas as the causes of Rasa. He also appreciates the efforts of Bhatta Nayaka who had suggested that Rasa is not a subject of ordinary psychology but of aesthetic psychology i.e. the psycho motive changes in a spectator. Dasgupta also considers positively the efforts of Abhinava Gupta in developing Rasa Theory and maintains that it was this critic who had effectively, explained the pathological symptoms of an emotion and how these symptoms, when presented in art, led to enjoyment. For instance, he explained how the experience of tragedy also leads to aesthetic enjoyment in art though the subject matter is grief. Dasgupta also tries to explain Rasa in terms of emotio-motive complexes through which emotions like fear or love, which are personal in real life, become universal in a play or art. This also explains how the personal and emotional gets transformed into artistic universal and artistic joy (Rasa).

Dasgupta, in particular, is highly appreciative of Bhatta Tauta, the teacher of Abhinava Gupta who had explained Rasa in the context of drama. Bhatta Tauta had argued that the actor who

plays the role of Ram may not appear to us as the Ideal Ram but it may not appear to us that he cannot be Ram either. Such an actor is somewhere between the Actual and the Ideal. According to Bhatta Tauta, the physical expressions of this actor along with music and scenery may evoke a vision of reality. It may also lead to a new experience for the spectators where they can start interpreting a physical occurrence and move towards a pure spiritual enlightenment. This experience, which begins at the personal and moves towards the universal is technically the process of Rasaasvadhana or Chamatkar (Transcendental experience). This also explains how a drama objectively deals with emotions and transforms the experience of these emotions to a universal realm.

5.3.5 Function of Rasa

In S. N. Dasgupta's view, art tries to universalize the local or the personal with the help of aesthetic enlightenment or Rasa. He believes that emotion-motive complexes are dormant in the minds of spectators which are evoked by the art that begins at the worldly level of Bhava or emotions that gradually moves to Alaukika or chamatkara, enabling the spectators to experience Rasa by interpreting the bodily manifestation of emotions or Anubhavas. Dasgupta also maintains that Rasa Theory is the best aesthetic explanation available in Indian poetics and he believes that it is highly useful in explaining and analyzing drama, dance and literature, especially with a focus on the spectator or the reader. One can align Dasgupta's interpretation of Rasa Theory and Rasa Theory developed by the Sanskrit critics with Reader Response Criticism.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Thus, S.N. Dasgupta not only appraises the many progression of Rasa theory across the ages but also interprets and collates the theory with much acclaimed western critical theory of the twentieth century. He explains the different elements of Rasa theory. He also elaborates on the working of Rasas and Bhavas and creates a bridge for the understanding of Sanskrit aesthetics. He, thus, provides us with a critical tool to examine Indian art forms and their emotional and aesthetic impacts.

5.5 KEY TERMS

Rasa siddhanta, sahrdaya, Bhavas, Alambana Vibhava. Uddipana Vibhava., Vyabhichari bhava, Rasasvadhana or Chamatkar, 'rasajna'

5.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1 True or False

1.   Alambana and Uddipana are types of Vibhavas.
2.   Rasas and Bhavas mean the same.
3.   Vibhavas are the causes of Rasa.
4.   Rasas are associated with fruits.
5.   Anubhavas are expression of emotions.

Q2 Define the following terms:

1.   Alambana Vibhava
2.   Sthayi Bhava
3.   Vyabhichari bhava
4.   Rasaasvadhana
5.   Sahrdaya

Q3. Attempt the following:

1. How does Dasgupta trace the evolution of Rasa Theory?
2. How does Dasgupta explain the working of Rasas and Bhavas?
3. What is Rasa Theory? How does Dasgupta explain it?

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Unit -6

"KUNTAKA'S THEORY OF POETRY: VAKROKTI" –S. K. De

Unit Structure

6.0 Objectives

6.1 Introduction

6.2 About the Author

6.3 Introduction to the Text

      6.3.1 Kuntaka's Notion of Vakrokti

      6.3.2 Levels of Operation of Vakrokti

      6.3.3 Classification of Riti

      6.3.4 Various Forms of Vakrokti

      6.3.5 Importance of Dhvani

6.4 Conclusion

6.5 Key Terms

6.6 Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to enable the students to comprehend the key notion of Vakrokti as conceptualised by Kuntaka. The unit also tries to explain the basic tenets of Vakrokti Theory as discussed by B. N De.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Indian philosophy abounds in theories that throw light on the nature of poetry. A number of Indian critics have referred to Vakrokti and its role in poetry in their works. Some of these were renowned scholars like Bhamaha, Dandin, Vamana, Rudrata, Kuntaka, Abhinava Gupta, and Bhoja. All these critics approach Vakrokti differently. For Bhamaha, it is Vakrokti that converts a piece of writing in to Poetry, the use of poetic figure to give a suggestive meaning of the literary expression. But, for Vamana, it indicates a particular figurative expression. And for Rudrata, it becomes a verbal figure. However, all these critics give Vakrokti a sketchy treatment in their works. It was Kuntaka who elaborated on Vakrokti sufficiently to develop a theory of literary criticism.

Kuntaka attached a special importance to Vakrokti. Prior to Kuntaka, although a lot of work has been done on Alamkara, emphasis has not been on the pleasure generated by poetry. Since it is this joy that is of paramount importance in literary studies, Kuntaka works around different ways of expression of ideas in poetry and shows how some turn of phrases are more satisfying than others. He uses this ability to turn phrases and to generate delight in poetry as a yardstick to measure its effectivity. So Vakrokti, which has two parts 'vakra' meaning crooked or unique and 'eukti' meaning expression or speech, becomes his tool for evaluating poetry.

Today, Vakrokti is said to mean obliquity. As a term, we find it in use in the vedas and puranas, especially in Atharvaveda and Agnipurana. However, the later poets who wrote in Sanskrit continued playing with the word and used it in many different senses. Some used it to express anger while others used it to express humour. But, its importance in poetry was never denied.

6.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. S. K. De was Professor Emeritus of Sanskrit at the University of Calcutta. He is a great Indian scholar who wrote extensively in the field of aesthetics. His acquaintance and understanding of Indian society was immense and he contributed freely to the perception of Indian Aesthetics as an independent entity with its own unique flavour, distinctly different from Western Aesthetics. His contribution in the area of Comparative Aesthetics has been enormous. He has written a number of articles and books. Almost all works on Sanskrit Poetics invariably provide reference to De's two volumes of *The History of Sanskrit Poetics.*

6.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

Dr. De in this essay places Kuntaka in the chronology of Indian Poetics and provides insight in to his historical standing and importance. He elaborates on Kuntaka's theory of poetry which has not found much patronage among the later writers. According to him, Kuntaka attempts to reveal the true nature of poetic beauty. He belonged to the 7th Century and has based his theory on Bhamaha's conception of Vakrokti. According to K. Krishnamoorthy, "aesthetic theory of Kuntaka bears very close affinity to the Crocean aesthetics all art is expression and that it is creative intuition which culminates in poetry."

6.3.1 Kuntaka's Notion of Vakrokti

Prof De explains that Kuntaka wrote this theory based on the central premise that the charisma of poetry is grounded on Vaicitrya or a strikingness of expression. So, De maintains, Vakrokti avoids expression of ideas by using conventional mode of speech. Instead, it demands the use of striking words. This is unlike sciences and the scriptures which require one to use established words or ways.

Generally, every word in a poem has a meaning but Kuntaka, as De reminds, says that every word in the poetry must be used in a unique way so that its meaning stands out conspicuously. According to Kuntaka, the poet must be skilled enough (Kavi-kausala) to use his imagination (kavi-vyapara) in innovative ways. This usage of the unusual in new ways in poetry (Kavi-vyapara-vakratva) is the ultimate source of poetry. Thus Vakrokti is a Bhaniti-prakara which requires the use of new and non-conservative phrases. Ruyyaka refers to this as Ukti-Vaicitrya or an extraordinary expression which depends on poetic talent.

While Dandin and some other critics give a lot of importance to Svabhavokti or a natural description of an object, both Bhamaha and Kuntaka do not accept their version. They argue that decorations are meant to beautify the nature of an object, but if the nature or Svabhava is already decorative, further decoration becomes pointless. Kuntaka, includes decorating of the nature of an object under Vakya-vakrata in which the nature of an object in both Sahaja and Aharya forms become the correct premise for heightened expression. Kuntaka includes Svabhavokti as an element of Sukumara-marga. Simillarly, both Bhamaha and Kuntaka feel that Atisaya (striking quality) or Prakarsa-kasthadhiroha (climax of excellence) is necessary for a striking style or Vicitra-marga and leads to Vakrokti-vaicitrya. The highest point of enjoyment, beyond what is achieved through usage of the best words, ideas or decoration is called Tadvid-ahlada-karitva and it is what Vaicitrya in poetry, which diverges from the usual trends, seeks to achieve. The Tad-vid or Sahrdaya or the man of taste who possesses a certain degree of culture and aesthetic instinct appreciates Vaicitrya in poetry by identifying with the feelings and moods of the poet. Abhinava Gupta defines, the Sahrdaya as persons with responsive hearts whose sensibilities are rendered transparent by a regular contemplation of poetry and who are capable of identification with the described object.

Kuntaka believes that Vakrokti alone can decorate the poetry or become its Alamkara. While actually it is the word and its meaning or Alamkarya which is in need of embellishment or decoration or Alamkara, Kuntaka does not give importance to the

difference between Alamkarya and Alamkara and includes them under Vakya-vakrata. He, like Dandin, uses the term Vakrokti as co-extensive with the generic term Alamkara. Vakrokti, he argues, is the only embellishment possible to word and its meaning and so-called poetic figures are different aspects of the Vakrokti.

6.3.2 Levels of Operation of Vakrokti

De observes that, according to Kuntaka, Vakrokti is the oblique use of language and it operates at six levels:

1. Varna: shabdalankaras or phonetic obliquity

2. Padapurvardha: suggestive use of linguistic elements & gunas or lexical obliquity.

3.Padaparardha: suggestive use of affixes etc. or grammatical obliquity

4.Vakya: figures of sense or sentential obliquity

5. Prakarama: episode in plot with unity and originality or episodic obliquity

6. Prabandha: whole plot or compositional obliquity

The first level is Varna-vinyasa-vakrata (phonetic obliquity or obliquity in the arrangement of phonemes or consonants or syllables). It works at three levels of phonemes: when similar or identical phonemes or consonants are repeated at varying intervals; when phonemes or consonants are arranged without any interval, when new phonemes or consonants are employed and when stops are combined with their homorganic nasals.

The second type of Vakrata is Pada-purvardha-vakrata (lexical obliquity). It is found in the base forms of substantatives. Its sub-varieties are based on obliquity in Rudhi (usage), Paryaya (synonym), Upacara (transference or fancied identification founded on resemblance), Visesana (adjective), Samvrti (concealment or covert expression), Vrtti (indeclinable), Bhava (roots of words), Linga (gender) and Kriya (verb).

The third type of Vakrata is Pada-parardha-vakrata (grammatical obliquity or obliquity in the inflectional forms of substantives) i.e. tense, case, number, person, voice, affix and particle and accordingly they deal with peculiar uses of Kala (tense), Karaka (case) Samkhya (number) Purusa (person), Upagraha (voice), Upasarga (affix) and Nipata (particles).

The fourth type of Vakrata is Vakya-vakrata (sentential obliquity) which has obliquity in a whole sentence admitting of a thousand varieties, including a whole lot of figures. It can be Sahaja (natural) or Aharya (imposed).

The fifth type of Vakrata is Prakarana-vakrata (episodic obliquity or obliquity in parts or episodes or incidents). It involves obliquity of emotional state, modified source story, episodic relationship, particular event and episode, dominant rasa, secondary episode, device of play within play, and juncture.

The last type of Vakrata is prabandha-vakrata (compositional obliquity or obliquity in the entire composition). It involves obliquity of changing the rasa, winding up the story, intending end, contingent objective, title, etc.

Kuntaka feels that Vakratva may be of infinite types as it solely depends on the individual creative talent of poets.

6.3.3 Kuntaka's Ideas on Riti or Marga

Kuntaka was influenced by the Riti-school of thoughts and had more elaborate views on Riti and Gunas than his master, Bhamaha had. Like Dandin and Vamana, he uses the word Marga as equivalent to Riti but he found faults with their system of nomenclature and classification of Ritis. His first objection to Riti classification is the practice of naming Ritis after places.While criticising Vamana and Dandin, Kuntaka says that it is wrong to associate poetic styles with particular countries or places or regions. Instead due importance must be given to the personality of the poet and to his abilities or power and to the reflection of his culture and extent of practice. As these are not determined by location, such practices cannot be considered healthy.

Secondly, he also objects to the gradation of Ritis on the basis of their quality. He argues that classifying Ritis as Uttama (good), Adhama (bad) and Madhyama (indifferent) is inadequate as only the good Ritis appeal to readers who are disinterested in the details about the other two. Thus the other two, Adhama and Madhyama, should not find any place in the classification.

Kuntaka puts forth two styles: Sukumara-marga and Vicitra-marga and distinguishes between them clearly as follows:

Vicitra-marga	Sukumara-marga
1. Svabhava of things important.	1.Striking quality of figure important.
2. Natural powers of poet emphasized and poetic talent is not artificial.	2. Poetic effort subordinated to object and art is chiefly decorative.
3.Exhibits Dhvani or suggestiveness.	3.Exhibits Dhvani or suggestiveness.
4. Rasa is according to Svabhava.	4 Ornamentation is according to Rasa.
5. Demands skill and maturity of treatment and so more difficult.	5. Not as difficult.
6. It is characterized by Madhurya or sweetness due to compact structure and no laxity.	6. It is characterized by Madhurya or sweetness due to usage of fewer compound words.
7. It is characterized by Prasada or lucidity due to use of expressive words and easy syntax.	7. It is characterized by Prasada or lucidity due to articulateness or perspicuity.
8. It is characterized by Lavanya or beauty due to the arrangement of short and long syllables.	8. It is characterized by Lavanya or beauty due to proper arrangement of letters and words.
9.It exhibits Abhijatya in the form of elevatedness, neither too soft nor too hard.	9.It exhibits Abhijatya in the form of smoothness.
.10 Characterized by Aucitya or usage of befitting words &ideas & Saubhagya or excellence due to realisation of all the resources of the composition.	10.Characterized by Aucitya or usage of befitting words & ideas & Saubhagya or excellence due to realisation of all the resources of the composition.

6.3.4 Kuntaka's Treatment of Rasa and Bhava

According to De, Kuntaka also negotiated the place of Rasa in the Alamkara theory. Writers like Bhamaha and Dandin had said that when the rasa is subordinate to the ordinary meaning, it is a rasavat alamkara. Kuntaka did not deny rasa as emotion but

he regarded it only as a mode of Vakratva in a composition. According to Kuntaka, Rasa is involved in the poetic figures of different Margas which give life to the poet's words and add to the charm of episode and plot-structure. According to Kuntaka, art is not different from arthalankara (figure of sense). It transforms the subject-matter and describes it in various ways. In other words, the writer describes the subject-matter in many ways based on the kinds of this obliquity produced by arthalankara. Kuntaka admits a thousand varieties of it and includes the whole lot of alankara in it. But he considers them useful only for producing grandeur and beauty. This is why, he holds that the writer should not employ them arbitrarily to describe the subject-matter. By introducing an element of strangeness into what one speaks or hears everyday, the alankaras satisfy a basic demand of human nature – a pleasant surprise.

According to Bhamaha and Dandin, Rasa was considered as a decoration for the poetic content. But consequent to Dhvanikara and Anandavardhana's insistence on Rasa as an essential part of poetry, Kuntaka theorized that rasa (sentiments) and bhavas (emotions) can be considered to be a part of poetic content. He contended that sentient objects can be characterized through proper development of sentiments like love. LIke Anandavardhana, he believes that rasas cannot be described by their name and poetry becomes appealing when it consists of rasas and bhavas. Kuntaka cites how love in separation in *Vikramorvasiya* and pathetic sentiments from *Tapasa-vatsaraja* make the poetry conducive to beauty by virtue of the charming words.

Kuntaka does not accept Rasavat as an alamkara. According to him, Rasa is invariably pradhana and can never take a subservient position to anything else. At the same time, it is not possible for Rasa to function as both alamkara and alamkarya. For Kuntaka, it is the poet who uses Rasa to create Vakrokti so that the fascinating element of the poetry is enhanced. Nothing else – no story, no plot – can evoke the magic in poetry. Sheer words that are selected carefully and used in fascinating ways by the poet with the right delineation of rasa enables a piece of writing to be raised to the stature of a poem. Thus, for Kuntaka, it is Vakrokti which allows one to experience Rasa. He says that whenever there is rasa that alone is predominant. Rasa is taken to be the artha of Kavya.

De reminds the readers that Kuntaka, thus, allotted an important place to Rasa in both styles, the Sukumara and the Vicitra and to both the modes of composition – a complete composition or one in parts or episodes. In the episodal composition, the function of the plot whether ingenuous or traditional, is to allow the development of the Rasa. Kuntaka

provides a number of instances of such use of Rasa. He says, it is possible to take the dominant Rasa to new heights as in *Vikramorvasiya*, Act IV or to develop and sustain a single Rasa in new and brilliant ways in spite of constant repetition of the theme or the dominant Rasa of the original story be replaced by some other Rasa.

6.35 Kuntaka's Treatment of Dhvani

De also comments on Kuntaka's views on Dhvani. Kuntaka treated Dhvani in the same vein as he treated other principles of literary criticism. He comprehends dhvani in some aspects of Vakrata. Dr. De uses Ruyyaka's explanation of this phenomenon to clarify Kuntaka's stand. He suggests that perhaps Kuntaka acknowledges dhvani in the form of Upacara-vakrata for here the differences between objects are covered up by highlighting their similarities. For instance, in the phrase 'particle of abuse', 'particle' in the sense of littleness has a pleasing effect when applied to the object 'abuse'. It may also be considered as Lakshana or transference of indication by writers of Dhvani school of thought.

Like Bhamaha, Dandin, Udbhata and Vamana, Kuntaka believes that Dhvani or suggestion is not the essence or soul of poetry but is only a secondary element. However, he appreciates its importance and does not just attribute it to Upacara-vakrata. He accepts the importance of Dhvani in Sukumar marga, but lauds it in Vicitra marga. He admits most of the broad divisions of Dhvani propagated by the Dhvani school like Dhvani based on transference and Dhvani based on power of word. He also indicates that suggestive expressions are as effective as expressed words Thus he is open to possibilities of suggestion of the object and seems to acknowledge the use of Alamkara-dhvani. For Kantaka, dhvani was therefore an important feature for the expression of the poets' Pratibha or genius. Though later writers did not accord a high place to Kuntaka yet it appears clear that an all-round estimate of literature with emotion and beauty as its root, as conceived by Kuntaka, seems to beat even the authors of the dhvani school, who were more or less obsessed by the dhvani and the rasa perspectives.

6.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, one may say that Kuntaka's efforts to reappraise the traditional categories of Indian poetics were refreshing and genuine. He truly wanted to accept and present the best ideas of poetics and he attempted to resolve contentious ideas in order to bring in clarity in the scenario of Indian poetics. His was an effort to unite amidst diversities. His literary sensibility and

aesthetic philosophy are indeed worthy of admiration. He explains and explores the confusing aspects of poetics and displays a unique ability for literary criticism. His poetic theory shuns controversies and is based on fundamentals that were acceptable to his predecessors and therefore it is widely read and appreciated even today. De's examination of Kuntaka's Vakrokti Theory brings Indian Aesthetics on par with western poetics. He also provides English equivalents to many Sanskrit terms used in Indian Poetics.

6.5 KEY TERMS

*Varna, Padapurvardha, Padaparardha,*Vakya, *prakarama, Prabandha,* alamkara, Vakrokti, Bhaniti-prakara, Ukti-Vaicitrya, Kavi kausala,Kavi Vyapara,riti,Dhvani, Vicitra marga, Sukumara marga, Upacara-vakrata, laksana

6.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1 Say whether the following sentences are True or False

1. Suggestive expressions are as effective as expressed words

2.In episodal composition, the function of the plot, is to allow the development of Dhvani.

3.Vicitra marga exhibits Abhijatya in the form of smoothness.

4.Vakrokti allows one to experience Rasa.

5.Rasa is invariably pradhana and can never take a subservient position to anything else.

Q2 Define the following terms:

1. Ukti-Vaicitrya
2. Bhaniti-prakara
3. laksana
4. Upacara-vakrata
5. Vakrokti

Q3. Attempt the following:
1. Elucidate the concept of Vakrokti. Briefly describe its nature and kinds.
2. Elaborate on Kuntaka's treatment of Rasa, Bhava and Dhvani.
3.How does Dr. De explain Kuntaka's ideas on Riti or Marga?

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Unit -7

"THE LANGUAGE OF PARADOX" – Cleanth Brooks

Unit structure

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction : New Criticism

7.2 About the Author

7.3 Overview of the Essay

7.4 Conclusion

7.5 Key Terms

7.6 Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarize the learners with the basic concepts of New Criticism. It also aims to make the learners understand Cleanth Brooks' views on the centrality of paradox in poetry.

7.1 INTRODUCTION: NEW CRITICISM

New Criticism was a movement in literary theory that dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. New Criticism developed in the 1920s and 30s and peaked in the 1940s and 50s. The movement is named after John Crowe Ransom's 1941 book, *The New Criticism*. Critical essays by T. S. Eliot, including "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Hamlet and His Problems", influenced some of the ideas of the New Critics, as did books like *Practical Criticism* and *The Meaning of Meaning* by the English scholar, I. A. Richards.

New Critics focused on the text of a work of literature and tried to exclude the reader's response, the author's intention, historical and cultural contexts, and moralistic bias from their analysis. It emphasized close reading, concentrating on the relationships within the text that give it its own distinctive character or form, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. New Critics emphasize that the structure of a work should not be divorced from meaning, viewing the two as constituting a quasi-organic unity. They defined

and formalized the qualities of poetic thought and language, utilizing the technique of close reading with special emphasis on the connotative and associative values of words and on the multiple functions of figurative language—symbol, metaphor, and image—in the work. Studying a passage of prose or poetry in New Critical style required careful scrutiny of the passage itself. Formal elements such as rhyme, meter, setting, characterization, and plot were used to identify the theme of the text. In addition to the theme, the New Critics also looked for paradox, ambiguity and irony to help establish the most unified interpretation of the text.

New Criticism was never a formal collective, but it initially developed from the teaching methods advocated by John Crowe Ransom who taught at Vanderbilt. Some of his students like Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and Robert Penn Warren developed the aesthetics that came to be known as New Criticism. Nevertheless, in his essay, "The New Criticism," Cleanth Brooks notes that "The New Critic, like the Shark, is a very elusive beast," meaning that there was no clearly defined "New Critical" school.

The popularity of New Criticism persisted through the Cold War years in both American high schools and colleges, in part, because it offered a relatively straightforward approach to teaching students how to read and understand poetry and fiction. To this end, Brooks and Warren published *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction* which both became standard pedagogical textbooks in American high schools and colleges during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

7.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cleanth Brooks (1906–1994) was a renowned American academic, specializing in poetry and literary criticism. Much commended for his pre-eminent work, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), he was a pioneer of New Criticism, a method of literary criticism based on the analysis of the language of the literary work itself, rather than the factual circumstances surrounding its creation. Working with writers such as Robert Penn Warren, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, Brooks developed his style of close reading. At the same time, he became indirectly involved with the Southern Renaissance, or the resurgence of prominent Southern writers (e.g., William Faulkner, Margaret Mitchell and Tennessee Williams), who created groundbreaking works and introduced innovative literary tools. While at the University of Oxford, Brooks collaborated with Warren, creating manuals that examined the pedagogy of poetry and literature, he published the influential *Understanding Poetry* (1938), integrating the basic tenets of New

Criticism. In it, he guides the reader in the understanding of poetry, not by its parts, but through its form and its impact as a whole. The textbook, which had four reprinting, covers narrative poetry, descriptive poetry and literary topics, including metrics, tone, imagery and theme. It also acknowledges the importance of cultural context in determining intention and meaning.

7.3 OVERVIEW OF THE ESSAY

Cleanth Brooks, an active member of the New Critical Movement, outlines the use of reading poems through paradox as a method of critical interpretation. Paradox in poetry means that tension at the surface of a verse that can lead to apparent contradictions and hypocrisies. His seminal essay, "The Language of Paradox", brings out Brooks' argument for the centrality of paradox by demonstrating that paradox is "the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry". Brooks bases his position on the contradictions that are inherent in poetry and his view that if those contradictions didn't exist, then neither would some of the best poetry we have today. The argument is based on the contention that referential language is too vague for the specific message a poet expresses; he must "make up his language as he goes". This, Brooks argues, is because words are mutable and meaning shifts when words are placed in relation to one another. In the writing of poems, paradox is used as a method by which unlikely comparisons can be drawn and meaning can be extracted from poems, both straightforward and enigmatic.

Brooks points to William Wordsworth's poem, "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free". He begins by outlining the initial and surface level conflict, which is that the speaker is filled with worship, while his female companion does not seem to be. The paradox, discovered by the poem's end, is that the girl is more full of worship than the speaker precisely because she is always consumed with continuous everlasting sympathy/empathy for nature and not as is in the speaker who is in tune with nature sporadically and temporarily, only while being immersed in it.

In his close reading of Wordsworth's poem, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge", Brooks maintains that the poem offers paradox not in its details, but in the situation which the speaker creates. Though London is a man-made marvel, and in many respects in opposition to nature, the speaker does not view London as a mechanical and artificial landscape but as a landscape made up entirely of nature. Since London was created by man, and man is a part of nature, London too is part of nature. It is this reason that gives the speaker the opportunity to comment upon the beauty of London as he would a natural phenomenon,

and, as Brooks points out, can call the houses "sleeping" rather than "dead", because they too are endowed with the natural spark of life, granted to them by the men who had built them.

Brooks picks up Wordsworth's own statement from "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" to drive home Wordsworth's pre-occupation with paradox to reveal the familiar world in a new light. Wordsworth has stated in his "Preface" that his general purpose was "to choose incidents and situations from common life" but ordinary things should be presented with, to the mind, in an unusual aspect." Brooks, further, argues that Coleridge clarified this and went a step forward to explain the paradoxical nature of poetry and life as a means of objectifying "the charm of novelty of things of everyday" and "directing it to the loveliness and wonder of the world before us".

Further, Brooks brings out the differential treatment of paradox by the Romantic and the Neo-classical poets, by illustrating Pope's lines from "The Essay of Man". In Pope, the paradoxes insist on irony rather than wonder, as is the case with Gray's "Elegy". Brooks also argues that both wonder and irony could merge in poetry as in Blake and Coleridge. Brooks insists that paradoxes spring from the very nature of the poet's language in which connotations play a major part. To amplify this point, he makes a reference to T. S. Eliot's view on poet's language – "that perpetual slight alteration of language", where words are always juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations. Brooks explains that unlike the language of the scientist, which must be free of ambiguity, the language of the poet is steeped in the contradictions of reality. In contrast to the scientific language, the poetic language can be modified to the extent of fluidity that it violates the literal dictionary meaning.

Brooks, further, points out I.A. Richards' view on the use of analogies or metaphors for expressing subtler states of emotions in poetry. According to I.A. Richards, metaphors lie not in the same plane but continually tilt, overlap and contradict, creating alterations in language and meaning. Brooks states that a simple and straight-forward poet too is forced into using paradoxes. But, he affirms that the use of paradox should not be for ornamentation or sophistry, but should be an extension of the normal language of poetry.

Brooks analyses John Donne's "The Canonization" to prove his argument. He ends his essay with a close reading of the poem which uses a paradox as its underlying metaphor. Using a charged religious term to describe the speaker's physical love as saintly, Donne, effectively, argues that in rejecting the material world and withdrawing to a world of each other, the two lovers are

appropriate contenders for canonization. Though it seems to parody both love and religion, it, in fact, combines them, pairing unlikely incongruous circumstances and demonstrating their resulting complex meaning. Brooks points also to secondary paradoxes in the poem: the simultaneous duality and singleness of love, and the double and contradictory meanings of "die" in Metaphysical poetry (as both sexual union and literal death). He contends that these several meanings are impossible to convey at the right depth and emotion in any language but that of paradox. A similar paradox, Brooks reminds, is used in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, when Juliet says "For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch and palm to palm is holy palmer's kiss."

Further, by drawing in from Coleridge's description of imagination, Brooks shows how the only way some ideas can be expressed is through paradox. According to Coleridge, it "reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities: of saneness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order .... ". Brooks points out that Coleridge's description of imagination is a series of paradoxes. He argues that since poetry tries to explain ideas and emotions as tangible as the idea of imagination, it too has to use paradox to best convey those thoughts.

7.4 CONCLUSION

Brooks seemed to regard paradox as a quality in language very much like Victor Shklovsky's defamiliarisation: that is, a deviation from conventional language designed to wrench our perceptions and our thoughts into unaccustomed and enlightening pathways. Paradox, in this view, is a device which compensates for the limitations of conventional language, and is thus the only way in which poets can express the unconventional and deeper insights. Parodox, for Brooks, is not just useful and entertaining, but necessary. "Paradox", he writes, "is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry".

Paradox, however, is essential to the structure and being of the poem. In *The Well Wrought Urn,* Brooks shows that paradox is so essential to poetic meaning that paradox is almost identical to poetry. According to literary theorist, Leroy Searle, Brooks' use of paradox emphasized the indeterminate lines between form and content. "The form of the poem uniquely embodies its meaning" and the language of the poem "affects the reconciliation of opposites or contraries." While irony functions within the poem,

paradox often refers to the meaning and structure of the poem and is thus inclusive of irony. This existence of opposites or contraries and the reconciliation thereof is poetry and the meaning of the poem.

7.5 KEY TERMS

Paradox, Irony, metaphor, opposites, imagination, form, content.

7.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 Say if the following statements are True or1 False
1. Paradox, according to Brooks, is a feature of poetic language
2, paradox does not refer simultaneously to the structure and meaning of a poem.
3. New Criticism employs close reading as a mode of literary analysis.
4. Cleanth Brooks agrees with T. S. Eliot's view that the language of poetry is full of alterations
5. Brooks observes that unlike Neoclassical poets, Romantics do not use paradoxes.

Q.2 Define the following terms
- Paradox
- Irony
- Close reading
- Metaphor

Q.3 Answer the following:
1. How is Brooks "Language of Paradox an example of the major concerns of New Criticism?
2. "The language of poetry is the language of paradox". Discuss.
3. Is poetic language the central, defining quality of poetry? Discuss with reference to the essay, "The language of Paradox".

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Unit -8

"ART AS TECHNIQUE" –
Victor Shklovsky

Unit structure

8.0 OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is to familiarize the students with the essence of Formalism and the key concepts in Shklovsky's "Art as Technique". The chapter also aims to trace the development of Formalism as a critical thought.

8.1.0 INTRODUCTION: TYPES OF FORMALISM

Formalism or Russian Formalism is a type of literary theory and analysis which originated in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1920s. In the beginning, the term 'Formalism' was used in a derogatory sense because the Russian formalists had excluded the subject matter and social values in their attempt to focus on the formal patterns and technical devices of literature. Later, the term gained a neutral designation.

Boris Eichenbaum, Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson were the leading representatives of Formalism. This critical movement was suppressed under Stalinist regime in the Soviet in the early 1930s and consequently, the centre of the formalist study shifted to Czechoslovakia.

Russian Formalism developed as two distinct movements: the OPOJAZ – (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) in St. Petersburg and the Linguistic Circle in Moscow.

Russian formalists proposed a scientific method for studying poetic language, to the exclusion of traditional psychological and historical approaches.

Formalism opposed symbolism and impressionistic studies. Formalists insisted on keeping the relationship between art and life apart. Further, it suggests a study focusing on the literary facts and literature over metaphysical commitments of literary criticism.

One central argument in Formalism is that aesthetic effects are produced by literary devices. Formalists also maintain that what makes literature is its difference from other facts. They also attacked the mystical posturing of poets. Further, they defined 'literary' as a special use of language. Formalists consider literature as special use of language and they argue that the literariness of poetic language becomes distinct when poets deviate from and distort 'practical' language.

Formalism as a critical practice has evolved in many phases. Formalists have aligned themselves in different schools of thoughts and practices. One can consider the main types of formalism in an attempt to understand the different pronouncements of the movement.

I. Mechanistic Formalism:

In this branch of Formalism, a literary work is considered as a machine. It implies that art is a sum of the literary and artistic devices that the artist manipulates to craft his work. This approach disconnects a literary artifact from its author, reader and historical background. A clear illustration of Mechanistic Formalism is Victor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" in which he argues that literary and linguistic devices make up the "artfulness" of literature.

Mechanistic Formalism also discriminates between art and non art. Yet another contribution of mechanistic formalists is the distinction between story and plot, or '*fabula*' and '*sjuzhet*'. They argue that story (*fabula*), is a chronological sequence of events, whereas plot (*sjuzhet*), can unfold in non-chronological manner.

II Organic Formalism:

This branch of Formalism considers an artifact as a biological organism. It proposes the theory that like in a biological organism, the parts are hierarchically integrated in an art form. Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" is a classic study in Organic Formalism. Peter Steiner explains the methodology of organic formalists: "They utilized the similarity between organic

bodies and literary phenomena in two different ways: as it applied to individual works and to literary genres" (Steiner:19)

The analogy between biology and literary theory proposed in Organic Formalism provided the frame of reference for genre studies. Steiner explains the model: "Just as each individual organism shares certain features with other organisms of its type, and species that resemble each other belong to the same genus, the individual work is similar to other works of its form and homologous literary forms belong to the same genre" (Steiner:19).

Organic formalists shifted their focus from an isolated technique to a hierarchically structured whole. By doing so, they could overcome the main shortfalls of the mechanists.

III Systemic Formalism:

This branch of Formalism accounted for the diachronic dimension of forms. It was also known as "Systemo-functional" Formalism. The major proponent of Systemic Formalism was Yuri Tynyanov. Steiner explains the basic tenet of Tynyanov's Systemic Formalism: "In light of his concept of literary evolution as a struggle among competing elements, the method of parody, "the dialectic play of devices", becomes an important vehicle of change."(Steiner: 21)

Systemic Formalism implies that since literature constitutes part of the overall cultural system, the literary dialectic participates in cultural evolution. It also upholds the view that the communicative domain enriches literature with new constructive principles.

IV Linguistic Formalism:

Linguistic Formalism places poetic language at the centre of its inquiry and it downplays the figures of author and reader. Leo Jakubiniski and Roman Jakobson were the major exponents of this branch of Formalism. Nicholas Warner explicates the interests of Linguistic Formalism: "Jakobson makes it clear that he rejects completely any notion of emotion as the touchstone of literature. For Jakobson, the emotional qualities of a literary work are secondary to and dependent on purely, verbal, linguistic facts" (Warner: 71)

Linguistic formalists distinguish between practical and poetic language. They maintain that practical language is used in day-to-day communication to convey information. Steiner explains Leo Jakubinisky's notion of poetic language: "the practical goal retreats

into background and linguistic combinations acquire a value in themselves" (Steiner: 22)

8.1.1 CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIAN FORMALISM

Russian Formalism was represented by two groups of theorists – the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the OPOJAZ group. Though the connotation of the title is neutral today, Russian formalists had come under the attack of the Marxist thinkers. The most important Russian formalists were Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Boris Tomashevsky, Yuri Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson. Once the Russian formalists came in for attack under Stalin's rule in the Soviet, they migrated to Czechoslovakia to establish the Prague Circle of theorists. Later, when Czechoslovakia became a target of the Nazi attack, they relocated themselves in the United States.

Russian Formalism developed during the years of the First World War and was, as Victor Erlich has put it, a "child of the revolutionary period….part and parcel of its peculiar intellectual atmosphere" (quoted by Bowlt:1972,1). However, Russian Formalism came under increasing pressure in the Soviet Union as a repressive attitude to literary theory developed there; and by 1930 it had been forced into exile.

Russian formalists claimed, contrary to symbolist assertions, that words and their connotations are not the most important ingredients of poetry. They replaced loose talk about inspiration and verbal magic with the study of the laws of literary production. They were also materialists and anti-traditionalists, who tried to reach some rapprochement with social and political concerns. At first their approach was somewhat mechanical, treating literature simply as an assembly of literary devices. Subsequently, they investigated the interrelatedness of parts, an "organic" approach. Finally, in 1928, Tynyanov and Jakobson recast literature as a system where every component had a constructive function, just as the social fabric was a 'system of systems'. But the short period of comparative tolerance of the early twenties changed as Stalinism tightened its grip, and the formalists were obliged to recant, turn to novel writing, or flee abroad. They realized that an aesthetic theory divorced from Socialism was a heresy in the Soviet Union.

From Russia, Formalism spread to Prague. However, Prague already had a structuralist objectivism derived from the 19th century writer, J. H. Herbart. When Jakobson arrived in Prague in 1919, he advocated a classification of artistic styles by formal qualities by employing a terminology drawn from figures of speech, especially

metaphor and metonymy. 'Foregrounding' the manner in certain elements or features came to be emphasized or brought to the fore from the background of more normal usage, became the chief concern of Prague School of Formalism. Notably, the interests of Prague formalists included tone, metaphor, ambiguity, patterning and parallelism in poetry, and diction, character, plot and theme in prose works.

8.1.2 CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN FORMALISM

Formalism was an important mode of academic literary study in the United States from the end of the Second World War up to the 1970s. The principles of American Formalism are embodied in the works of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren.

Rene Wellek was known as a Czech-American comparative literary critic and he was born in Vienna, speaking Czech and German. He studied literature in Prague and was an active member of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Later, he moved to the University College, London to teach in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. After World War II, he lived in America and he taught at the University of Iowa, and later at Yale University. He took with him to the United States the principles and practices of Russian Formalism, though he was better known as one of the founders of the study of comparative literature. He collaborated with Austin Warren to produce a landmark text, *A Theory of Literature.*

Edward Austin Warren was born in Massachusetts and he graduated from Harvard University. He received a Ph.D. in 1926 from Princeton University. He taught at the University of Minnesota, Boston University and the University of Iowa. He befriended T.S. Eliot, Evelyn Underhill, Rene Wellek and Allen Tate during his stay at these universities. With Rene Wellek, he authored *A Theory of Literature*. Wellek contributed to this work the insights he acquired from his familiarities with Russian Formalism, Prague Linguistic Circle and Stylistics. Warren's contribution to this work originated from his knowledge of New Criticism and aesthetics. The work discusses an intrinsic approach to studying literature, discussing the use of devices such as euphoms, rhythm, meter, style, imagery, metaphor, symbols and myth. The study also has a section on literary genres and the study of literature in the graduate school.

8.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Victor Shklovsky was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on 12th January, 1893. After finishing his graduation at the University of St. Petersburg, he established the Society for the Study of Poetic

Language (OPOJAZ). He was a member of the literary group, Serapion Brothers, along with Nickolai Tikhonov, Mikhail Slonimski and Konstantin Fedin. These writers insisted on the right to create literature that was independent of political ideology.

In 1925 Shklovsky, published *On the Theory of Prose* and in 1928, *The Technique of the Writer's Craft*. In these works, Shklovsky argued that literature is a collection of stylistic and formal devices that force the reader to view the world afresh by presenting the old ideas or mundane experiences in new, unusual ways.

Shkvlovsky is remembered for his concept of *Ostranenie* or defamiliarization in literature. He explains the idea as follows:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. (Shklovsky, "Art as Technique")

In addition to literary criticism and biographies about such authors as Lawrence Sterne, Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Mayakovsky, Shklovsky wrote some semi-autobiographical works disguised as fiction.

Shklovsky's works pushed Russian Formalism toward analyzing literary activity as integral part of social practice, an idea that became important in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and the scholars of Prague School.

8.3 AN OVERVIEW OF "ART AS TECHNIQUE"

Formalism was a mode of critical enquiry which became fashionable in the early decades of 20th century in Russia and East European nations. As a literary movement, it attacked historical, sociological, philosophical and other intrinsic approaches to literature. The basic premise of Formalism is the belief that poetic language is different from the ordinary use of language. Formalists believe in a scientific study of textual dynamics such as the use of words, syntax, sounds and figures of speech. They also opposed vehemently symbolism and other subjective interpretation of literature. They also maintained the difference between art and life. Another belief central to Formalism is the concept of literary facts. Formalists believed that literary facts are given in the text and the readers have to understand them through literary techniques. This implies that it is possible to arrive at an objective scientific

understanding of the meaning through the literary techniques of a text.

Russian formalists advocated strongly for the exclusion of psychological and historical approaches to literature and instead they were interested in the artistic devices of imaginative writing. The focus of Formalism was on the form of the text rather than the metaphysical concerns of literary criticism. One of the chief arguments of Formalism is that aesthetic effect is a product of literary devices. They understand 'literary' as a special use of language. In effect, Formalism attacked the mystical posturing of poets and it considered literature as a special use of language. Formalists claim that literary language becomes distinct by distorting practical language. In the final phase of Formalism, critics like Bakhtin and Thomashevsky started exploring into other formal aspects of fiction like the narrative and motif. Bakhtin's concept of narratology was an extension of Formalism.

Victor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" is a seminal work in Russian Formalism. It is largely about the function of art and poetic language. Structurally, the essay is divided into two parts – the first part explains the theory of defamiliarization and the second part deals with poetic language.

The essay begins with Shklovsky's attack on Russian Symbolism. He analyses the statement of Russian symbolist, Alexander Potebnya that art is thinking in images. Shklovsky exposes the fallacy in this statement and explains that there are many art forms like music and architecture which do not have images. He says that art is essentially a technique, which helps one to recover the sensation of life. He argues that perception becomes habitual in life: they are largely automatic. He says that when perception becomes automatic, life becomes unconscious or mechanical. Human beings do not feel things and objects that they see because they develop an attitude called algebrization. Algebrization is explained as 'automatization' of perception. That is reducing the details to convenient letters or words. For instance the sentence:"the Swiss mountains are beautiful" is algebrized to 'tsmab' with each letter reminding one word of the sentence. This tendency, Shklovsky argues, creates the economy of perceptive effort.

Shklovsky indicates that the technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make the forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception. He says:"art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important."

Shklovsky says that familiar objects are not significant and art removes objects from the automatism of perception so that one has to spend more time to understand them. He also gives a series of examples of this defamiliarization in literature. Shklovsky argues that many novels and poems have employed defamiliarization to stretch the time of perception. He gives an example of defamiliarization from Leo Tolstoy's novel *Shame*. He says that Tolstoy describe familiar objects as if he were seeing them for the first time, by not naming them deliberately. Shklovsky says that in *Shame* Tolstoy has defamiliarized the idea of flogging. He quotes from the novel.

"To strip people who have broken the law, to hurl them to the floor, and to wrap on their bottoms with switches."

This description doesn't use the term flogging but the readers will have to spend more time to understand the description is about flogging. Shklovsky also talks about another novel of Tolstoy, *Kholstomer* which defamiliarizes the familiar world with a different perspective. The narrator in this novel thinks about private property and hears various names being called out. The narrator also sees a restricted world, that too just in front of him. The readers take time to realize that the narrator is a horse and hence the world seen in the novel becomes unfamiliar and difficult.

The second part of the essay is about poetic language. Shklovsky implies that poetic language is defamiliarized language. He says that poetic speech has artistic trademark which is defamiliarization of the language itself. He indicates that poetic language is difficult and roughened and it removes the automatism of perception. He says that in poetry, language deviates in its phonetic structure and syntax. Shklovsky says that poetic language produces a slowness of perception as for instance, the word 'sunne' is to be understood as 'sun' or the word 'Frye' is to be understood as 'fry'. He indicates that archaism, obscure style and conceits are used with the same objective. However, he reminds that if there are too many experiments in poetic language, the occasional use of simple language can also do the trick.

Shklovsky gives ample examples of defamiliarization in poetic language. He says that sexuality and love are defamiliarized in poetry from the days of Boccacio to the modern poets. He says that in Boccacio's *Decameron* one finds "catching nightingales" which has significant figurative implication for the sexual act. Shklovsky also maintains that erotic subjects are presented figuratively in metaphysical poetry. He says that Donne and the other metaphysical poets refer to sexual organs in terms of 'lock and key,' 'quilting tools' or "bow and arrow". According to Shklovsky, such devices make poetic language strange and

wonderful. They also lead the readers away from the recognition of objects.

Shklovsky refers to a fellow poet and critic Leo Jakubiniski who had brought in the idea of phonetic roughening, that is, using unfamiliar sounds in poetry. Shklovsky believes that language of poetry is a difficult roughened one. He calls that as impeded language which can be regularly seen in poems of Pushkin. He says that both rhythm and disordering of rhythm can create defamiliarization in poetic language.

Shklovsky extends the notion of defamiliarization to the study of fiction. He says that in fiction, story and plot are different. He says that some novelists defamiliarize the art of story-telling with the help of different narrative devices. He gives the example of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* a novel in which the narrative doesn't give any story about Tristram. Shklovsky reminds the readers that there are different story lines in the plot that emphasize the structure of the novel rather than the story. He says that Sterne, by violating the form, forces the readers to attend to it minutely. He also says that the readers become aware of the form of fiction once it is violated.

Shklovsky concludes the essay with a typical anti-romantic statement. He argues that sentiments cannot be the mainstay of art. He says that art is transemotional and it is unsympathetic. He also reminds that emotions in a work of art are the products of different points of view and that a point of view is also a technique.

Thus, Shklovsky in "Art as Technique" spells out the basic theoretical formulation of Formalism – that art is a technique. He also attacks historical and romantic traditions in literary criticism by suggesting intense formal analysis of literature, instead.

8.6 CONCLUSION

Formalism holds the view that aesthetic effects are produced by literary devices and hence it focuses sharply on these devices. It brought to the fore the study of items like narrative, poetic language, plot, motif and style.

8.7 Key Terms

Formalism, Poetic Language, Defamiliarization

8.8 Check Your Progress

Q.I Say if the following statements are True or False

1. Victor's Shklovsky's essay is concerned with biography and intention of the writers.
2. Defamiliarization is a poetic blemish, according to Shklovsky.
3. Formalism insists that poetic language is different from ordinary speech.
4. Poetry brings back the sensation of life in man by making the familiar look different.
5. The basic function of art is to stretch the time of human perception.

Define the following:
1. Defamilarization
2. Automatizaton of Perception
3. Formalism
4. Algebrization
5. Symbolism

Answer the following:
1. Consider Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" as a foundational essay in Russian Formalism.
2. Discuss, with examples, Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization.
3. How does Shklovsky prove that poetic language removes automatization of perception by producing slowness?

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