

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Our discussion of the Indian and Western poetics in previous chapters brings us to a stage where it is necessary to arrange the tangled threads together and make a few generalizations on the basis of our analysis and findings. We may also here re-state our perspective and show the striking parallels between the two traditions.

This study has been an attempt to understand and analyse the use and implications of poetic language especially in the Indian and Western critical theories. The analysis of the poetic language of the two traditions is an effort to discover the possible parallels and similarities. From the analysis that has been done in the previous chapters, it is obvious that though there are parallels and similarities, each has been able to maintain its own distinct identity. However, the parallels are so remarkable that one can reasonably assume that the theories of poetic language in the West seem derived for the ones in India or Indian theories seem to be the forerunners of similar theories in the West. But this is in no way to claim the supremacy of the one over the other. Both had their individual importance. The circumstances and the environment of the different ages in which they flourished have had a considerable influence in the shaping of these various theories of language. Each had its own merits and limitations. If the Indian poetics leaned heavily towards on attainment of a mental state akin to

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spiritual bliss, the Western poetics was biased towards an attainment of momentary sensuous pleasure. Language, which was itself treated as the language of gods in Indian poetics was treated like any other medium of expression in Western poetics. The theory of poetry was elaborately discussed in the major works in Indian poetics, in the ancient time, but in the West, the language of poetry received attention only very recently in the twentieth century, and there is no comprehensive analysis of the various factors which went into the making of a good poem. Although there are certain convincing theories in the West, most of them treated the subject in an elementary manner.

The Sanskrit poetics, on the other hand, had the tendency to devote itself almost exclusively to the pleasure of profound philosophical and intellectual thought. It did not explain fully the essential character of the poetic imagination or expression, and this fact was probably responsible for the zeal with which the theorists devoted themselves to the methodological problems involving facts leading to universal categories. Such an investigation has yielded fresh facts. However, there were glaring defects in such an approach. The Sanskrit theorists, as S. K. De points out, failed to realize that “each expression is unique and indivisible; that artistic facts in their unified concreteness cannot, like physical facts, be divided and subdivided; that they cannot, like intellectual facts, be logically formulated into abstract universals.”¹ S. K. De further states that the Sanskrit theorists apparently forgot “that a work of art is institution, that institution is individuality, and that individuality never repeats itself nor conforms to a prescribed mould. They believed, thus, not in the unity but in the duality of

imagination and expression, thereby splitting up what is organic into mechanic parts.”² One cannot write by rules, and words as symbols should be treated as living particulars, an integral part of the poet's institution, and not as a recollection of some abstractions. ?

So both the theories, Western and Indian, need to be presented together in some kind of conceptual relationship, each serving as a corrective to the limitations of the other. The limitations of the Indian theory can be made up by strengths of those of the West and vice versa. Such an approach of complementarity is helpful in theorizing the nature of comparative criticism.

Unlike the Western theorists, the Indians developed a theory of poetic ontology quite early but unlike the Western again they did not have a continuity of their theories. After the 16th century theories in India almost died down and none of the poeticsians made any new contribution towards theory building. Modern Indian criticism fell apart from the ancient tradition because they could not find the ancient theories relevant any more. They began to depend more and more on the Western theories. The ancient Indian theories, instead of being used for practical criticism, remained as the relics of the past having no direct implication to reading, writing and teaching of theory. Modern Indian critics did not try to improve upon them so that they become useful tools. On the other hand, the Western criticism continued to flourish. Each new Western theory developed in opposition to its predecessor extended the scope of the earlier theories and developed itself in relation to the needs of the time.

The New Critics had argued that the study of literature could also be a "science." (But) with structuralism and the rise of linguistics as a strong discipline, the emergence of a scientific criticism became possible. With structuralism, the notion that the primary task of criticism was evaluation gave way to a more scientific approach towards the study of literature and its taxonomy. Thus some of the limitations of the New Criticism were corrected by subsequent theories. But one can say that it was the New Critics who paved the way for a scientific approach to literary study through their minute description of things in the text. Brooks's idea that every poetic work has a contextual meaning other than the ordinary, everyday meaning itself reflects this scientific orientation.

The Russian Formalists, like the New Critics, also developed some fascination for a scientific study of literature. But they gave hardly any importance to the contextual meaning. For them the literary text was an autonomous structure with no meaningful connection to social history. They were considerably influenced by Saussure's concept of *langue* and *parole* distinction and viewed literary text as a unified, self-contained entity. They believed in the unity of form and content, which was a kind of oversimplification for both semantics and aesthetics. The distinction of form and content would imply that different stylistic choices can communicate the same logical content but have different rhetorical effects. In this dissertation I have attempted to study the function of language in poetry in the two traditions in order to understand that there is a commonality of interest between diverse traditions, and that a comparative study of such a common ground will yield interesting results for a theorist of literature.

Notes:

¹S. K. De, *Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetic* (Bombay: Oxford UP, 1963) 77-78.

²S. K. De 78.