Abstract

The present study centre round a discussion of the functioning of Indian criticism from Bharata to the present. Vast and amorphous as the subject undoubtedly seems, it hopes to give a connected account of Indian work in Criticism which should help to understand the value of the past and the present predicament.

The Thesis is divided into five chapters, namely, (1) The Foundations of Indian Literary Criticism (2) Sanskrit Poetics and its present exponents (3) The Bridge-builders — Hiriyanna, Aurobindo, Coomaraswamy (4) Recent Indian Literary Criticism in English and (5) Conclusion.

The Introductory Chapter "The Foundations of Indian Literary Criticism" attempts to show how the "foundations" of this branch of learning like many others in India are to be found in Indian philosophy. The main argument rests on the view that the essential Indian outlook on life has played a significant part in determining our kind of literary criticism. To enjoy the bliss of Brahman is not merely the ideal of the Upanishads but of literature too. The same set of values and ideals that nourished the one seems to have sustained the other; the concepts of Santha, aucitya, nishkama karma, pramana, prayojana, purusartha, etc., are common to both and belie the notion current in some quarters that literary criticism grew independently of philosophy.
Scholars like Prof. M. Hiriyanna who trace the affinities between aesthetics and philosophy are invoked in this connection to illustrate how philosophy percolated to every department of life in ancient India. A knowledge of this relationship is found to be essential in tracing the origin of Indian poetics itself, for the answers to such questions as why and how it came into being take us back to the very fundamentals of Indian philosophy, the values of prama and bhrama (right knowledge and illusion). The concept of pramāṇa which was applied to measure the values of life must have been the same operative principle behind criticism whose business was to measure the values of literature.

The second chapter on "Sanskrit Poetics" is conceived with the intention of forging links with the vital past of India with which we have severed connections. Unlike in the West one can discern in the Indian critical function, as in other spheres of human endeavour, a certain continuity, though after the first millennium A.C. there have been long periods of drought alternating with brief spells of resurgence.

It should be admitted that Sanskrit Poetics has seldom received the same kind of recognition in the West that is usually accorded to other branches of Indian learning — religion, philosophy, art and creative literature. Consequently, (for values must come via Europe) even in India, the Indian has by and large ignored his own critical heritage.
A live critical tradition has thus been relegated to classrooms offering formal courses in Sanskrit, helping to give currency to the myth that Sanskrit literary criticism consists of "little more than pettifogging rules and minute classifications of rhetorical figures". This view is not merely refuted but an attempt is made to point to the positive advantages emerging from the study of Sanskrit criticism.

It seeks to show how the "Dark Ages of Europe", as they are usually called, happened to be the most creative period in Indian history (as a host of great names, Bharata, Bhamaha, Dandin, Vamana, Anandavardhana, Kuntaka and Abhinavagupta with their contributions of Rasa, Alankara, Riti, Dhvani and Vakrokti testify), as "some of the newest approaches of the New Critics of the West had been discussed by them threadbare before the first millennium A.C. was out". Hence the hope that the Indian approach may have something for the West to profit by. But the main point is not to direct our attention to the reception of Indian Poetics by the West but turn our own attention inward so as to achieve an awareness of our critical heritage and its present relevance. Representative critics from Bharata to Visvanatha are taken up for detailed study, pointing out in the process the great advances they had made in their theories of literature, often anticipating the work of most distinguished modern Western critics.

The present Sanskritists like De, Kane, Pandey, Raghavan,
Krishnamoorthy and Dwivedi are also brought in so as to examine their contribution to our understanding of Sanskrit criticism. Their Histories of Sanskrit Poetics and their translations of some of the most vital critical texts provide even the non-Sanskrit reader with an access to ancient critical modes and thought. Hence, the role of these Sanskrit scholars in perpetuating their critical heritage, and making it available to the modern reader is treated as quite significant.

However, while the Section contains a plea for following one's svadharma, it does not call for an abandonment of Western literary criticism; on the contrary, highlights the need for integrating it with our own tradition.

The Third Chapter entitled "The Bridge-builders" discusses the contribution of Hiriyanna and Coomaraswamy to aesthetics and of Aurobindo to critical theory and practice. The three stalwarts are treated individually and at fair length so as to call attention to the immensity of their achievement and the supreme relevance of their work to the modern times. Ironically all three have suffered undeserved neglect, if the paucity of critical material on their work is any indication. Hiriyanna's contribution to aesthetics which is about the nature of art experience; the content, method and end of art; Aurobindo's theory of mantric poetry which takes us back to the Vedas and places us in tradition; the gigantic leap he makes from past to
present to future to define poetry with unprecedented originality and the supreme heights to which he raises poetry by investing it with a profoundly spiritual and philosophical import; and the phenomenal work of Coomaraswamy which put Indian art on the map of the Western world and helped India take her "due rank as a first-class artistic power" are the focus of attention. The reason why they are chosen in particular is that they, more than any others, have tried to recover the vital past of India and help bridge the gap between the past and the present. With their amazingly modern and sophisticated outlook and temper coupled with their inwardness with different traditions and cultures they have also acted as mediators between the East and the West. Sri Aurobindo is as much at home with English and European literatures as with Sanskrit and to an extent his own native Bengali and Coomaraswamy as much with Indian art as with traditional European and to an extent the whole of Asian art. In addition to this their revival of interest in Sanskrit Poetics which had ceased to be a major force after Jagannatha Pandita in 17th century (that makes the transition from 17th century Sanskrit criticism to the present smooth and unobtrusive) is perhaps the most valid reason for bringing them in at this juncture. Thanks to their efforts, the contemporary Western educated Indian critic, largely alienated from the mainstream, can now not merely link himself to his immediate past but also trace his
lineage to the Vedas. Simply put they help to restore us to our long-lost tradition and give us a sense of continuity. An intimate knowledge of the "Art Experience" of Hiriyanna, the art-criticism of Coomaraswamy and the "Future Poetry" of Aurobindo ought to form part of the essential equipment of the contemporary Indian critic, because being Western educated, they can be our immediate examples worthy of emulation.

It is against this background that recent Indian criticism in English — I had to narrow my concern to English what with my ignorance of our own literatures — is examined in Chapter IV. The method has been to select important critics writing on Indian-English and Overseas literatures and make close studies of some representative pieces not with a view to fault finding — that would be patently presumptuous but with the intention of understanding why or how some of the best practitioners may have failed to point to the nature of the critical function and the critic's responsibility. It cannot be denied that the Indian critic has often failed to rise to a full awareness of his responsibility by writing in the Western mode without relating himself to his context in time and place. However, some little rectification has come from within the Indian intellectuals themselves — some of whom have rebelled against uncritical and wholesale Western borrowings and pleaded for a "swaraj in ideas" by showing how if it is impossible to move forward and one can only
turn back, it would be more honourable to "catch up with one's own yesterdays" rather than with "other people's yesterdays", for that at least might arrest the present practice of looking up to the West exclusively.

The earnest desire to respond from an Indian centre that one discerns in this second phase of critical activity marks the beginning of a resurgent movement in Indian critical history. Here is no sentimental plea to go back to the past but the stirrings of an awakened conscience to pursue one's svadharma even while assimilating outside influences, which explains why even when a revival of interest in Sanskrit Poetics is urged they have not lost sight of present problems such as tools, criteria and values. It is obvious that there is little demonstration of application in Sanskrit criticism, even while there are first-class theories and concepts. Hence the predicament of the contemporary Indian critic in English faced with two streams of critical thought, the Indian and the Western. The choice is not one of 'either/or' but both, because to ignore either would impair his pursuit. The need of the hour therefore is to adapt Western borrowings to our needs intelligently and critically and integrate them with our critical modes where possible. However, the desirability of making an Indian approach is quite persistently made, for the objective is to show that since Western scholarship has yielded certain results, it might now be profitable to
explore other possible modes and ways of looking at literature, for such approaches might result in new perspectives and fresh insights.

The "Conclusion" therefore, discusses the prospect lying before the present Indian critic in English who can capitalize on the monumental work done by his immediate predecessor Aurobindo and achieve a breakthrough if only he combines in himself the rigorous discipline of the West and the profound apprehension of the East. While, in the best of Indian criticism to date, there is awareness of the urgent need to go back to the classical past, of India and an effort to provide an Indian centre for the practising critic there is no sustained application of Sanskrit critical tools themselves in the judgement of a poem, play or novel. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent our traditional theories are inadequate to judge modern literatures or if the literary works themselves can't bear the weight of classical treatment. The future Indian critic therefore has to have not merely a fine sensibility and vigorous intelligence but a thorough grounding in Sanskrit Poetics and Western critical approaches because he has to guard himself against misapplication or overzealous use. However, there seems to be little doubt about the benefits that accrue from making an indigenous approach not only to our own literature but even to Western
literatures since it holds promise of an original contribution to knowledge; the gift of one culture to another. As the Germans and the French have shown their distinctiveness in their assessment of Shakespeare in particular and the French in the way they look at Anglo-American literature it should be possible for Indians with their different way of life shaped largely by their unique world-view to respond differently and show some strikingly new results. Aurobindo has led the way in *Future Poetry* and we should aspire to take him forward.