

English (Hons) Part-3, Paper-5, Unit-3; Topic - "The Function of Criticism", Lec-No-31; BY: VIJAYESH KUMAR.

Remaining part of the Lec. No-31:

Eliot's views about Criticism:

In the fourth part of the Essay "The Function of Criticism", Eliot analyzes various aspects of criticism. First of all, he comments about the terms 'critical' and 'creative' and also ridicules the way Matthew Arnold bluntly distinguished the two.

According to Eliot, critical activity is of great importance for works of creation. The major part of the effort of an author in composing his work is 'critical labour' which includes 'the labour of shifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing'. Eliot considers the critical effort done by a writer on his own work, to be the highest kind of criticism. He believes that creative writers having superior critical faculty are superior to other writers.

Creative Criticism: - Eliot opposes one of the basic beliefs of literary studies that critical and creative activities are separate. According



To him, Criticism forms a large part of the effort undertaken for creation. However, he states that critical writings can not be creative. Because there is a fundamental difference between creation and criticism, an effort for creative criticism would be neither creative nor critical. Creation has no conscious aims but criticism has fixed purpose concerned to something other than itself. Criticism could not be autotelic and is aimed at elucidation of works of art.

Qualifications of a critic: Eliot also talks about the qualifications of a critic. He considers 'a highly developed sense of fact' to be the most important quality of a critic. The sense of fact is a rare gift and is very slow to develop. Eliot also states that 'workshop criticism', i.e. criticism by a person who practices creative art himself is most valuable. He also says that the part of criticism attempting interpretation of an art should be based on facts. According to him, critic's function is not to interpret, for interpretation is something subjective and impressionistic. So, as Eliot states, the true interpretation



is giving the possession of the facts to the reader. The true critic puts his knowledge about facts before the reader in simple manner. He also suggests clearly that by the terms 'fact', he means the technical aspects concerned to work of art.

Critical Tools: Eliot considers "Comparison" and "analysis" to be the chief tools of a critic that should be used with care and intelligence. He believes that that the method of comparison and analysis is preferable over the conventional interpretation if used judiciously.

Eliot states that even trivial facts can not corrupt taste. However, critics like Coleridge and Goethe corrupt by offering opinions and fancy. Eliot also cautions against obsession for facts. Trivial facts should not be chased. He also says that critics should read the works themselves rather than reading views about the works.

He also opposes "lemon squeezer" critics, i.e. the critics who try to squeeze too many meanings from the text. He says that critic should not get indulged with trivialities.

So, as per Eliot, "analysis and comparison, methodically with sensitiveness, intelligence, curiosity, intensity of passion and indefinite knowledge, all these are necessary to the great critic".