

BATESON- A REVIVALIST

S. Lora

Assistant Professor
Department of Career Development Centre
SRM University
Chennai, India

‘Literature’ is one of the most intellectual forms of art. People always define Literature as ‘the study of life’ and ‘mirror of life’. This is because literature presents the life of human culture as it is, from time to time. It is an aesthetic creation, which has been recognized as a subject meant for elite people earlier. One can hear at this post-modern era, people mocking Literature as something meant only for delight and not for study. However, this sentence itself pronounces the dignity of Literature, how it makes people think.

All the above definitions of literature are the outcomes of rational thoughts, which were the result of questions like, ‘what is Literature?’, ‘what constitutes Literature?’ and ‘what has Literature done to one?’ These expressions are what we can say as the beginning of criticism. Not only manuscripts define criticism, but the response or reaction or discussions that take place among people about a thing or work or happening can also be called as criticism. G.N.Devy in his introduction to the book *Indian Literary Criticism* says, “Expression which is capable of transcending culture and time comes to be recognized as ‘Literature’. The notion of what constitutes ‘Literature’ keeps changing from one era to another and from one culture to another. ‘The notion of what constitutes ‘Literature’ should probably be the rudimentary definition of ‘Literary Criticism’” (xiii).

Research and criticism are not something that prevails only in literature, we can find criticism and research work in all art forms and in almost all disciplines. The Department of English that offers the study of Literature has transcended into various forms and has got renowned terms such as Communication studies, Language studies, Humanities, Culture studies, Romance studies, Nature studies and so on. In this twenty first century, where the notion of

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

literature is keeping on changing; literary aspects, which is the premise of literary research has also been changed.

The discussions, movements, seminars and conferences go hand in hand with the studies that are mentioned above and with the deviations of literature like Marginal studies, Indigenous studies, Colonial studies, Oriental studies and so on, rather with the literary aspects of a text such as narrative structure, style, theme, structure, form, tone and mood. For instance, a conference that took place recently' centered on 'chotro', which was all about indigenous and tribal studies, the cultural and ritual aspects of a particular clan and community people. The term 'chotro' itself gives the meaning of what it is all about. It was a literary form for tribes.

Though, this marks a healthy environment, it also shows that people are concerned about the people at other dark end, the notion of seeing other (indigenous) people as an object of study and the literariness seems vanishing in this aspect. Literary persons, who have passion for literature are now in an unleash state to revive literature and its literariness. The collective amnesia that made people to forget the true literature has to be cured.

F.W.Bateson was an English literary scholar and critic. He had a scientific and historic approach to literary criticism and he was skeptical too. *The scholar-critic: An Introduction to literary research* is a basic methodological instructional book for literary researcher. The book has eight chapters arranged sequentially that gives the process; one has to carry out during his/her research. More than speaking about the relevance of this book, we can see this book as an essential work, which is needed to revive the importance of literariness in the field of literary research.

The book has lots of information and guidance, with subjects like bibliography, textual criticism, use of reference books and the presentation of material in literary dissertation. The liveliness of his arguments, which is still appealing and helping the students and scholars of literature, is itself a great evidence of its relevance. For instance, Bateson differentiates journalistic writing and scholarly writing in his initial chapters, to make the reader clear and in order to insist the importance of 'scholarship' he states, "scholarship is above all an antiseptic against aesthetic self deception. And mature criticism is not possible unless it has been preceded by a modicum of scholarly discipline" (25)

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Bateson tells the reader that a scholar-critic must possess works of reference regarding every fact, so that none can do a redo or re-reading in one's original work. Bateson guides the reader by giving many encyclopedias, references, dictionaries, which cannot be ignored at any point of time. He states, "The budding scholar cannot do without these books of reference, but an almost immediate discovery that he makes in that none of them can be trusted even at the lowest factual level. And with the discovery comes the beginning of mature scholarship" (27).

The job of a literary researcher at first hand is to identify the literariness. The depth the research is to look into the work or the object. Analyzing and synthesizing the work makes the work more appealing to larger extent. Bateson not only speaks about the basics of research, but also of the style, names of presentation and methodological aspects for literature and non-literature. The sense of fact, reference, style and presentation in the chapters validates that Bateson not only helps one discipline but is necessary for any researcher.

Brevity, clarity, effectiveness, titles, quotations and coherence of argument are the important elements that makes a research best and Bateson has provided all these elements and guidance to the reader to go ahead in his research to attain the best. Bateson not only gives a usual mechanical process that has to be followed by a research scholar, but he wants a scholar-critic to be a deserved one. This can be sorted out where Bateson wrote about examinations as, "not a test of his understanding or appreciating of literature, but of an agile brain, a good verbal memory and a ready pen" (2). He also mentions, "...Examination is simply that it is testing adults by methods by appropriate for adolescents" (3).

The Modern Language Review has stated:

The thread of argument that runs through the book gives it unity is the conviction that fact and value are inseparable, that literary criticism and literary scholarship are interdependent studies. It is the way in which Mr. Bateson illustrates this argument in any chapter that gives the book in special quality of intellectual piquancy. (136)

As long as the literary people carry out their research in the field of literature, so long Bateson's work will be alive to guide at an aesthetic experience. From the above assertions, one can definitely conclude that Bateson is not just relevant, but he has to be demanded to bring back the aesthetic aspects of literature and in its research field.



References:

- Bateson, F.W. *The scholar-critic: An Introduction to literary research*. London: Routledge and K. Paul.1972. print.
- Devy, G.N. *Indian Literary Criticism, Theory and interpretations*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan. 2002. Print