



F. R. Leavis's Stature as a Critic

DR. Rakesh Kumar Pandey

Associate Professor- Department of English, National P. G. College, Barahalganj-Gorakhpur (U.P.) India

Received- 10.05. 2019, Revised- 14.05.2019, Accepted - 20.05.2019 E-mail: rakeshpandey1110@gmail.com

Abstract: *F. R. Leavis's declaration of the altered mind and the altered expression meant that the function of criticism must be larger and more serious than it had been in the last fifty years, just as it meant that a new voice, a new idiom, and a new manner must be found for criticism and for literature. It had to be moral as well as aesthetic; or rather it had to serve the moral purpose implicit in its nature. In fact, an adequate response to great literature calls for power and fineness in thinking, force and delicacy in feeling, and there are powers which cannot be separated from a mature moral faculty.*

In this research paper, it is examined that Leavis is concrete in his analysis of particular works of literature. He is firmly committed to moral taste, but doesn't formulate broad generalizations of ethics and typical natural goodness in the manner of Dr. Samuel Johnson

Key Words: function, perception, necessity, concrete, qualification, criticism, idiom, criticism .

Leavis seems Coleridgean in his conclusions. His own essay in *Scrutiny* (vol. ix, 1940)¹, he gave his admiration to Coleridge who combined a creative gift with a rare critical intelligence at an important moment in poetic history. He appreciated that in the religious and intellectual history of the nineteenth century Coleridge exercised a profound and spreading influence. The above essay takes its stand on the integrity and autonomy of literary criticism, which is a discipline of the most delicate relevance. Coleridge himself called 'the physiognomy of the being within', that is his own creative activity. When he speaks, therefore, of 'an implicit window deeper than our consciousness', as one of the profound sources of Shakespeare's creativity. He is making not only a statement about Shakespeare but a revelation about himself. Leavis considered it as one of the essential canons of criticism. Certainly it brings the idea of a fundamental human morality. Leavis continually invoked, more like him, a central instinctive human tradition. It is a feeling, as Coleridge explained when writing about women in Shakespeare that 'the feelings are representative of all past experience'. The connection between language and human experience, as something closer and subtler as he affirms ... words

are not things, they are the living powers ...' Obviously, it was Coleridgean endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things. Language constructs meaning and this gives our experience its peculiarly human note. According to Coleridge, Shakespeare's language was not drawn from any set fashion, but from the profoundest depth of his moral being.

Leavis's thoughts have to do with society, the collapse of cultural continuity, education, the university, the necessity of literary studies, their essential quality and function in producing educated class, and the nature of human experience as it is embodied in language. Leavis sees England as rapidly turning into a little America. Leavis informs that we still have a model for living continuity in one language, and supremely in our literature, together with an institution, the university: "The problem is to maintain the full vital continuity of our culture".² He further affirms that it cannot be inherited, but has to be created and sustained. He insisted on the two of the most important things, i.e. responsibility and creativity. Certainly, he needed not to make a show of sustained expository method.³

The writers, Leavis chooses for his criticism, are Blake, Dickens, Eliot and Lawrence. In



the case of Blake and Eliot he writes with strong but definite qualification and of Dickens and Lawrence, with a full and committed enthusiasm. He finds Blake as bringing into creative continuity and culture a new sense of human responsibility.

Conscious and intense creativity is continuous and inseparable from human perception which makes art, and supremely literature, essential to mankind. His genius manifests itself in "a profound communicated insight into the nature of human life, the human situations and human potentiality".⁴ Of course; Blake offers an understanding of human nature.

Leavis points out that certainly Dickens was the last great writer to enjoy something of the Shakespearean advantage.⁵ Blake, in this context, leads directly to Dickens. Leavis gives two meanings of this context, the first, and the situation in which -

"Collaborative and creative renewal, the cultural consciousness and the power of response - fade into nullity, and technological development, together with administrative convenience... impose the effective ends and values of life, at the cost of an extreme human impoverishment".⁶

And secondly, the new development of creative expression of the nineteenth century engages the major geniuses and prose in the form of the novel "takes over the supreme function of poetic creation... The achievement in the English language is one of the great poetic chapters in the human record. The England the novelist from Dickens to Lawrence form organic continuity; the intelligent study of that entails a study of the changing civilization (ours) of which their work is the criticism, the interpretation and the history: nothing rivals it is as such".⁷ Leavis himself points out that in Dickens as in Blake there is an unbroken connection between perceptions, self, and the major creativeness of the great artists.

Leavis insists that for Dickens as for Blake there is continuity from the creativeness of perception by representing the elementary manifestations of life and in both the spontaneity goes with trained skill.⁸

Certainly Dickens, the social critic as well as a dramatic novelist, whose, social criticism invoked values which transcend the social values, reflected a concept of human life. It was not the reformer's a preoccupation, powerful as that was, but the instinctive grasp of the magnificent understanding of, and the brilliant rendering of human life and creativity. Leavis writes:

I think of myself as an anti-philosopher, which is what a literary critic ought to be... and every intelligent reader of creative literature is a literary critic.⁹

Leavis says that if language is the paradigm of a lost cultural continuity, then literature is the metaphor, the gathered force, and that continuity which gives access to what Leavis calls 'The Living Principle'.

In the case of T. S. Eliot, Leavis points out that Eliot was a major genius disabled by inner contradictions. It might be his nihilistic approach. Eliot, Leavis declares that his life suffered in him. Leavis criticism of fiction, morality is not at the root of criticism but this knowledge, impression and function. He himself called it the living principle, and it was this which he found constructed in Eliot and creatively free in Lawrence. For Leavis the novelist's thought was identical with his creativity. The instrument of Lawrence's thought was the English language:

English as he found it was a product of an immemorial our genesis collaboration on the part of its speakers and writers.¹⁰

For Leavis, Lawrence was essentially English, Eliot both American and too much in irritating Francophile.

D. H. Lawrence in his communications with others showed an ease and spontaneity that came from genuine interest - "They were humanity and life, and he was obviously without pretensions or designs".¹¹ Lawrentian art, like the Lawrentian imagination, Leavis concludes: Concerned intensely for the real, being an indispensable mode of the intelligence that explores and tests experience with a



view to establishing what was real, for our best insight and apprehension, is"12 Lawrence's thought was a concrete thought, a spontaneous thought and a responsible thought.

Religion in Laurence was more inclusive, more natural, more wholly the issue of a flow of life than it was in Eliot, so that there is an unbroken connection between his deepest instincts and his highest art. In the same way in Leavis deep human instincts, profound communication, natural piety, informs the highest flights of intellect and the subtlest practice of criticism.

Leavis forced University teachers of English to treat Lawrence and Eliot seriously and with respect Like Matthew Arnold, Leavis was fastidious in his taste and rejected anything which was carelessly admired. He was wise enough to keep metaphysics and philosophy out of literary criticism. His criticism demanded attention to the "words on the page". He defended the poetry and criticism of T. S. Eliot, the middle and later poetry of Yeats and novels of D. H. Lawrence with the excitement of personal discovery and fierce brilliance. He considered Joyce as insufficiently central and serious and condemned Virginia Woolf because she was unnecessarily concerned with the impressionistic response to experience. In the book, "The Great Tradition" he searches for the great tradition in English literature and reject those who don't belong to it. He considered Donne and Hopkins as much better poets than Shelley and Tennyson. He elevated T. S. Eliot to the high pedestal of English poetry and dislodged Milton from that high place because

Milton's work was nothing but that of brick - layer to him. He saw a danger in viewing literature from a philosopher's ken. The romantic view of the world, a view common to Blake, Shelley and Wordsworth was of little interest to him as literary critic. He also rejected the two culture theory of C. P. Snow.

Leavis reputation as a major critic and the recognized leader of modernist English criticism is secure. He was a great champion of the New Criticism and will always be remembered for his memorable contribution towards it.

REFERENCES

1. Leavis, F. R. *Scrutiny*, vol. IX, No. 1, (June, 1940), p.58.
2. Leavis, F. R., *English literature in our Time and the University* (Cambridge & Cambridge University Press, 1967).
3. Leavis, F. R., *Nor Shall My Sword* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1972), p. 106.
4. *Ibid.* p.14.
5. *Ibid.* p. 130.
6. Leavis, F. R., *English literature in Our Time*, *Ibid.* p. 172.
7. *Ibid.* p. 172.
8. *Ibid.* p. 178.
9. Leavis, F. R., *Thought, Words and Creativity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), p. 34.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
11. *Ibid.*, p.32.
12. *Ibid.*, p.60.
