

**R.B. Patankar's Views on Aesthetics: Finding the Real Significance
in the Content of a Literary Work**

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There are different theories and critical canons for analyzing works of art. Some critics have taken text as the source for formulating the real value of the work while others take socio-economic milieu, the role of language and its constituents like signifier and signified besides evaluating works on psychological/gender plane. Here again western and eastern critical parameters differ. On the one hand western theories are based on the ideology nurtured on alien concepts. On the other hand Indian theorists are also divided into numerous schools. Some critics take Indian literary theory as synonymous with Sanskrit Poetics, while other modern theorists try to take a balanced view, without brushing aside all western theories and accepting blindly all that has grown on Indian soil. They opine that theories should fashion according to the requirements of the time. Anything that had been very valuable in the past can not be the same value in the present time. Now new theories are being explored in the literary works and the relevance of the theories to the society is being tested for its utility. Umpteen Indian scholars have applied both Indian and Western aesthetics for creating a climate of concerns related to conceptual clarity and terminological methodological precision. R.B. Patankar is one among these critics of the first order. He writes about criticism and involves himself in analyzing the ideas of western origin and Indian tradition. Saundaryamimansa is an examination and

restatement of ideas, concepts and terms. His essay 'Aesthetics: Some Important Problems' raises serious and fundamental issues related to the tradition and identity of Indian Criticism. The focus is entirely on Marathi Literature and criticism of the last forty years, but the issues discussed will have immediate relevance to literatures in other Indian languages too.

Dr. R.B. Patankar judges the relative merit of western art tradition/aesthetics vis-à-vis Eastern aesthetics, besides analyzing the relative significance of aesthetic theories to the creative works. He points out this fact that aesthetic theories are conceived and developed in the womb of living and developing art tradition. To quote him, "The aesthetician or the theoretical critical can not take the place of the parents. His is a much humbler task, that of watching the speedy growth of the foetus to help it in this process, till it comes out in the world in a perfectly normal healthy condition." (Devy 390). Similarly, Patankar foregrounds the significance of the literary tradition in the sphere of criticism for making a correct assessment of the literary works. A critic has to be equipped with intellectual skills to grasp the intricacies of the content of that literary work. It has not to be just linguistic jugglery. To cite his views in this regard "If criticism is to be good, the critic must have absorbed his literary tradition and have the minutiae of new literary works which is faced with. He is expected to have certain intellectual skills, because he has to study the aesthetic data supplied by a work of art and on that basis reason his way to evaluative judgment....our practical criticism by and large has degenerated in to smart, verbally titillating chat or verbal pyrotechnics" (390).

Dr. Patankar's views on the impact of Sanskrit aesthetics/poetics on the present day criticism are also very dynamic and explanatory. He expresses indebtedness to western framework in contrast to the age old Indian critical theories. To quote him, "The concepts we spontaneously use today do not appear to have received due attention and emphasis in Sanskrit poetics" (392). He asserts that Indianness is a changing concept. Anything that was applicable in the tenth century may not be relevant in the present time. He writes, "We must constantly keep in mind that we are today's Indians and bear only a limited resemblance to our forefathers of the ninth and the tenth centuries." (393).

The critical theories are developed in the fertile soil of the creative works/conditions of that time. The circumstances that fashion the attitude of the artist also decide the critical canons

to be used for evaluating them. So being Indian doesn't mean to follow or imitate the canons formulated years back. To quote him "We should therefore frankly admit that today we spontaneously work within the western frame work both as creative writers and aestheticians. To ask us to use theories like that of rasa will be a form of cultural tyranny. If we spontaneously begin to create literary works similar to those our forefathers created a thousand years ago. We shall equally spontaneously adopt the pre-Mammatra critical framework" (393).

About Sanskrit poetics and aesthetics he says that nobody would analyse a modern Indian play on the basis of Sanskrit structuring principles of Sandhis and Sandhyangas nor in terms of Alambara, Vibhavas, Anubhava, Uddipana, Vyabharibhavas. According to him, "Sanskrit theoreticians agree that rasas are closely related to purusarthas, the four ultimate goals of life. But Sanskrit poetics does not tell us how to discuss the moral problems presented in a contemporary novel and further how to evaluate that novel in the light of this discussion. A play is today regarded as valuable on the ground that it gives an original and deep insight into life. These evaluations can not be made from within the framework of Sanskrit poetics" (394).

According to Dr. Patankar, Aesthetics in the west is the age old game. The first moves were made by Plato and Aristotle; later Kant and Hegel enriched it and in the present time the baton has been carried forward by the people of the same caliber. The present Indian critical theories have developed through this rich western tradition.

For this purpose, he has charted out the entire growth trajectory of critical traditions. He asserts that the critical theory of the present time is influenced by the nineteenth century English literary theories and to some extent it is the part of a long tradition of critical thinking from the Greek days to the modern age. Besides the artistic tradition in whose womb this theoretical tradition grew has also been in existence for over two thousand years. It has also undergone major transformations but there was never a complete break. The reason is crystal clear that there has been an equally long intellectual tradition in the west. To quote him, "This shows how the present west enjoys long and vital traditions of art, art criticism and intellectual efforts in all fields. This explains the advance, the west has made in different fields like aesthetics, moral and social philosophy, epistemology, logic, philosophy of science, metaphysics" (394). Here the

critic makes the plausible suggestion that India has to build that infrastructure today for taking critical insight into new heights otherwise we will be having only ethereal Pushpaks.

Patankar has formulated certain basic rules for attaining this objective. The first is to reject aesthetic frameworks accepted and assembled on a rarefied theoretical level and attempt an spontaneous undistorted, honest response to a literary work. To quote him, "If we analyse this response, we shall begin to discuss in it a conceptual structure and corresponding structural principles in its correlative i.e. the literary work itself. This is sure to happen because the nature of a literary work and our spontaneous response to it are inter-dependent" (394). The critic is of that opinion that there can not be any one principle for judging all genres of literature. If any one critic has that notion, it can be called 'transcendental illusion' in the terminology of Kant. To quote him, "The theoretician in literature is subject to a similar illusion when he assumes that there must be one principle common to all literature. He has therefore to reconcile the impulse to unity with the awareness of multiplicity" (394). He explains this fact with the help of an analogy. At the time of sunrise or sunset the sun appears larger than it does at noon, but it is scientifically proven fact that the size of the sun does not really undergo a change at the time it rises or sets. This happens in the case of literary works/literary critical works too. It is found that the writer has stressed on one or the other aspects greater than others.

Besides Patankar has mentioned certain guidelines for analyzing different facets of art like music, painting and literature. In literature again separate yardsticks/parameters of aesthetics have to be applied for fiction, drama and poetry. To quote him, "The insight that people have in the arts, if they have it all, is usually restricted to one art or one of the varieties of a particular art rarely to two. Let us suppose that a theoretician has obtained a genuine insight into fiction and drama...when the theoretician wants to extend the principle of probability to a non-literary art, for example, music, he is faced with a problem. How can the structure of a musical piece be compared with the structure of reality? A novel can be and very often is realistic. How can the principle of probability be applied to music?" (394-95). In addition to it no critic can be an authority on all fields of art.

According to Patankar, people who have attained some degree of sophistication and discipline in other intellectual fields show a surprising degree of nativity when they deal with the

concepts of arts, because they do not understand all aspects of the function of aesthetics. So the critic writes, “The aim of aesthetics is to analyse the statements which critics make about the works of art and concepts embedded in these statements. This analysis includes the study of (a) the logical peculiarities and (b) the content/substance of the relevant concepts” (398).

The literary works have certain conventions. To cite him, “For a literary work owes parts of its value to its being new, different; both of these concepts (newness and difference) are relative and not absolute. Difference presupposes similarity and newness implies the existence of conventions, tradition and history. Awareness of literary classification is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the production and criticism of a literary work.” (398). Thus there is a need for accommodating in our conceptual structure both the universal and the particular.

According to Patankar, there is a big difference between theoretical criticism and the criticism of particular literary works. A critic worth the name does not apply any abstractly conceived principles to concrete literary works. To quote him, “So long as human life continues to be what it is, we can not avoid using different models for analyzing different concepts” (399). Patankar then makes a threadbare analysis of the entire configurations of literary works evaluated on the basis of non-literary products like dreams, day dreams, myths, fairy tales, contents of the social unconscious and ritual. For this he suggests that they should have good knowledge of disciplines like psychology and anthropology. Similarly literary works were judged on the basis of linguistic competence. He writes that scientific language is used to describe reality; literary (poetic) language is used not to describe anything, but to express/induce emotions. To quote him, “When Cleanth Brooks says that the language of paradox is the language of poetry, he too in mind has a similar context between two varieties of linguistic discourse” (401). Besides some critics discover certain structuring principles peculiar to poetry (literature): these are reconciliation to opposites, paradox, ambiguity, irony etc. But Patankar believes that some literary work may be characterized by these but all literary works might not be analysed on that count. To quote him, “If the type of principles mentioned above, are treated as sole differentiators of all literature, the differences between various forms of literature are easily lost sight of. If a lyric by Donne, a Shakespearean tragedy like *King Lear* and *Dostoevskian*, novels like the *Brothers Karamazov* can be identified with the help of the one

distinguishing mark alone, where is the need for the existence of the different forms such as the lyric, the drama and the novel?... That the lyric is an important form of literature is of course a fact. But to treat it as a paradigm for all literature in all its aspects is potently wrong” (401).

According to Patankar the criterion for evaluating a literary work lies within itself, because individuality is our inalienable constituent of any literary work. He avers that a work of art will be incomplete so long as it is finite. It will be complete only when it covers the whole universe. While taking the example of two short stories of the same author on two different themes, he formulates the criteria for finding greatness in literature with goodness in literature. Thereafter, he stresses the value of the content of the work of art, which makes it different from non-art. He writes that Luxman Mane’s book *Upara* is significant because for the first time people know about Kaikadi tribe. To cite him, “The book has made a substantial addition to our general awareness of tribal life. The range of our experience and understanding has been widened. But this is not all; more important than this is the fact that the structure of our customary emotional and ethical responses has been shaken. We have realized the nature of the high degree of tension and hostility that is generated when an inter caste marriage takes place. We have also realized how tenaciously the caste system continues to live in at all levels in our society” (406). Here he makes a difference between as sociological book and a literary work giving an insight into society. To quote him, “Sociological studies give us knowledge of reality on the plane of abstraction. Individuals have no room in these studies except as example. When we read *Upara* or Daya Pawar’s *Baluta* we feel as we are watching actual actions of real people taking place before our eyes” (409).

It is also affirmed by Dr. Patankar that all art experience is not characterized by delight/rapture. According to him everyday experiences are pleasurable or non pleasurable, or they contain both pleasure and non pleasure. To quote him, “It is argued that in the Rasa experience, the sattva predominates and the Rajas and Tamas are weakened, this inevitable renders the Rasa experience pleasurable. This argument is not based on a particular metaphysical theory” (408-09).

The critic is of the opinion that Tamas is in ascendance when we are reading an escapist romance which takes us away from reality. Similarly it can not be said that Rajas, the principal at

the basis of all our actions is weakened in a literary experience. In the same way he has described about detachment. To cite him, “Our response is not merely emotional. In the context of many literary works, our response includes different elements such as our capacities to know, to think, to act and to act morally; it comprehends our total value system. And in the context of these literary works ‘detachment’ merely means absence of overt action with regard to the characters in literary works and perhaps also non-involvement of the empirical self” (409). This can be explained with the help of Shakespeare’s Othello. Othello can not be dissuaded from killing Desdemona but at the same time readers are as much disturbed by the murder of an innocent woman in the actual world. This shows that characters in a play have the capacity to induce in us real life emotions.

Similarly Patankar underlines the need of a good content in novels, stories and plays. To cite him, “A literary work owes its existence as a literary work in a large measure to a content of a certain quality that it embodies while we are looking for the features of form of a literary work. We shall have to keep this fact constantly in mind. To forget the demands of the content will be a big blunder” (412). Here we have to take into account two concept pairs in the context of literature (a) semantic context and its expression and (b) constituents like character, situation, events, ideas, emotions etc. and their organization. He also puts forward the views of B.S. Mardhekar that emotive meaning is the medium of literature. And the literary artist aims at organizing emotive meanings in accordance with the three laws of rhythm viz. harmony, contrast and balance. They constitute beauty in art and nature. The content of a literary work brings with it the values of our everyday life and thus literature promotes these life values.

Thus R.B. Patankar has expatiated upon the relative merits and demerits of western and eastern conceptual set up of literary theories with regard to the present day requirements of literature. He finds western aesthetic structure more favourable because of its being “very comprehensive, complex and well built” (416). He also makes a fervent and convincing suggestion that innovative approach has to be adopted to evaluate Indian literary works. Here a proper symmetry has to be maintained between content and form because the latter to some extent helps in the clarification of the former. He favours the altering of literary theories as per the creative works produced in different periods rather than the theories affecting the works. The

works are the by-products of the ground condition prevailing in the socio-politico-economic-cultural fabric of the country. To quote him, “Aesthetics will then get its due place even if it turns out to be low, it will be its legitimate place” (416).

WORK CITED

Devy, G.N. (Ed.) Indian Literary Criticism, Theory and Interpretation. New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2002.