

RAMNARAYAN V PATHAK: A PATRON CRITIC OF GUJARATI LITERARY CRITICISM

Abstract

Ramnarayan V. Pathak, a notable reflective critical mind of the 19th century, bears historical and critical significance in the contexts of Gujarati as well as pan Indian language literatures. His work pertains to varied domains such as creative writing, literary criticism, literary history, translation, prosody, epistemology, and aesthetics among others. Pathak's creative and critical orientation causes strategic deviation in his register, tenor, content and execution in sync with nature of his discourse (historical, formalistic study, philosophical, social, political, aesthetic etc.), form of discourse (critical essay, review, radio talk, key-note address to seminars, etc), audience (informed audience, general readers, students, academics, etc.), subject matter (study of poetic meters, Indian Darshana theories of knowledge, practical criticism of writers like Narmad, Tagore among others). This paper intends to study translatorial perspectives on critical writings of RV Pathak in terms of theory and practice.

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Ramnarayan Vishwanath Pathak is that literary figure who should be rightly deemed as the link between pre and post independent period of Gujarati literature and literary criticism. However, unfortunately, this literary personality was overshadowed by the personality of a short story writer. And with the passage of time he was completely erased from the formal forum of literary criticism and theory. Thus, this introducer of native modernist trends in the Gujarati literature was forgotten and then completely abandoned as a critic except short story writer. He brought into Gujarati criticism the native methods to evaluate and review the western work of art and scripted a new era in the history of literary theory and criticism in Gujarat. Had Gujarat and then political writers not played dirty with Pathak, his works would have lift Gujarati literature to the stature of any other literature in the world.

Pathak is that lost gem who brought a novel outlook for the Gujarati literature and also explained how a work of art should be interpreted. Besides this, he didn't stop just pointing at how a work of art should be evaluated, he also discussed the new ways of interpretations of the literary theory and criticism that too by our own form of literary theory and criticism! He was the first, for that matter even today, critic who held the opinion that a systematic study of our Indian Poetics should be done while everyone else of his time was championing the study of western criticism and theories. Considering his views and his incisive way of evaluating literature, he can easily be termed a savior of Gujarati literature. To understand the legendary personality of RV Pathak, every facet of his personality should be interpreted and understood.

RV Pathak began his writerly career at the age of thirty-two; late though as a short story writer which he did not actually intended. Just as Thomas Hardy did not primarily wish to be known for novels, Pathak did not so much as care to be known for his flair for writing short-story. He started writing short-stories for the literary journal Prasthan which started in 1926. He himself has confessed that he never wanted to try his hand on short-story writing as he was always inclined towards literary criticism. But one has to admit that once he began on the course of storytelling, he did not limit his stories to its popular form but he took it to a different level of literary finesse and human consciousness. Although he involved variety to his storytelling like tales for children, social realism, psychological issues, historical incidents, religious and political ideology, fantasy, crime thriller, fables, etc., more interesting is to underscore his literary genius of not repeating style and theme in each of his writings. Usually a writer tends to exploit the style that brought him or her literary fame and fortune. For example, Nhanalal, Dhumketu, Ramanlal, and Pannalal resorted to the same creative tools and techniques that made them famous. On the other hand, every new work by Pathak would dodge 'readerly expectation' with 'writerly surprise'. He went on exploring the genre of storytelling with different styles, subject, composition, tone. This form has in fact brought him the title "dwiref".

The same experimental temperament of Ramnarayan is visible in his poetry writing too. He has published his poems under the pseudonym of 'Shesh' which was technically describing the sadness that filled his life after his first wife's death. Apart from the romantic themes one can observe the uniqueness of the poet in his philosophical and religious poems. His Bruhatpingal is the ultimate example of his experimentation and his thorough understanding of Indian Poetics. Here, he discusses the metres, verses, rhetorics, prosody, metrical recitation and non-metrical recitation of poetry from the Vedic to the contemporary

time. He has studied medieval and modern Gujarati poetry and traditional folklores in depth which works as a proof of his critical sense. To prove his point he cites the Sanskrit scholars as well as Gujarati writers. His main concern is Sanskrit literary theory and criticism but he was equally conversant with the Western theories and criticism. However, he did not allow this mastery to blinker his creativity and understanding of what it means to be independent in true sense! His this sense can be seen his essay 'Some Issues of Our Criticism' wherein he discusses many western concepts in the light of Gujarati literature. He also makes an effort to make critics understand that the literature of one nation cannot be measured by the scale of other nation. Moreover, he also says, in his essay 'Kavya ane Satya', that there is a dire need to study our Indian literary theory and criticism. Besides, this western literary theory and criticism has not given any natural theory or criticism so far except counter arguments to their own theory and criticism.

While critics like Suresh Joshi explains western theory by citing Gujarati examples, Pathak talks about evaluating our own literature by our theories and criticism and even goes a step ahead by stating that their literature should be measured by our scale. In his essay 'Reviewing Literature' he says that we should critique with our own independent and distinctive perspective the great Western poets such as Homer, Shakespeare, and Tolstoy. This would prove beneficial for the betterment of our own literature. Besides, our audience who is unknown to the western literary tradition and history, is not able to relish the work nor appreciate the work. This gap can be bridged when author cites western examples critiqued by Gujarati criticism. This mode of interpretation will enable our audience appreciate new art forms.

Pathak's critical sensibility was essentially formed of Sanskrit literature and poetics. He was very keen in his observations of the Sanskrit writers too. His writings do critique Mammata's analysis of Rasa. He believes that Mammata's assertion on metres of poems is a bit exaggeration as poem can be non-metrical. Though his critical sensibility was chiefly formed of Indian poetics, he does talk about Western poetics to explain his thought. Thus, he bridges the gap between Gujarati and Western literary theory and criticism. When he talks about the singability and non-singability of poetry, he openly deconstructs the western form of non-metrical recitation of poetry. He firmly states that every Gujarati poem is recital. Before this modern thought of non-metrical recitation of poems was introduced every poem in our tradition was recital since the Vedic times. He also asserts that English poetry is non-singable, as they are prosaic. He goes to the extent of saying that English songs are also non-recital as they prosaic only but they can be metricized with music. He poses the question on the creation and need of non-singable poems in Gujarati literature. But this does not mean he abandons the creation of it. He does accept the form of non-recital poems in Gujarati literature and opines that we owe English literature for this.

His critical analysis is free from personal statements or comments whether it is a person, literary genre, public talk, etc. For example in his essay Gandhi's Prose when he talks about Gandhiji as a writer, he lets no other personality of Gandhiji affect his evaluation of Gandhi as a writer. He may be the first critic of his time who was courageous enough to make it clear that even the impact of Gandhi could not bring the people of India in unity. He opined that the people of India got freedom at that time when they were not ready to digest the freedom. Thus, the fault was not lying in the efforts of Gandhi but with the psyche of the people of India.

Pathak was the only critic of his time, or for that matter even today, who was able to make Gandhi understand the true responsibilities of a critic towards the society. And that was proven when he left Vidhyapith as he was not able to compromise his moral responsibility. He did not deter from his decision even when Gandhi himself insisted him to return. All other members of the group of the then Vidhyapith were of the opinion that all those which triggers nationalism should not be published in the journal of Vidhyapith while Pathak was of the opinion that all these nationalist writings should be published as these writings will awake the moral and patriotism in the Indian people. However, it was only Pathak who held that opinion while all others were against it and that led to Ramnarayan quitting Vidhyapith.

There were many who criticized Pathak for his action and many reacted to his decision but he remained calm and did not bounce back to the criticism of others. He was so a gentle man that he never made it public that the actual reason of his leaving Vidhyapith was Kaka Saheb Kalelkar. Kalelkar was the person who asked Pathak not to publish the nationalistic articles in Prasthan. He also asked that as an editor of the journal, Pathak should be answering to all these articles instead of publishing them in his journal. Pathak could not compromise his duties and so he left Vidhyapith.

As a critic Pathak's style is Vaidarbhi. He writes in simple, short sentences without making exaggerated use of nouns and adjectives. His tone is that of prescriptive and descriptive but he also believes that the writer or critic's job is not to butter the particular people of the society but to address the social functions of literature in general.

Pathak is well noted, established and popularly read as a creative writer; marginally considered in academic discussions, and almost overlooked as an important critic. In fact, while at Gujarat Vidhyapith, Ahmedabad, he not only taught but produced a generation of famous poets like Umashankar Joshi, Snehrashmi, Nagindas, and Sundaram among others. The proposed work aspires to bring out to a wider readership a hitherto unnoticed reservoir of critical writings of a doyen of 19th century Gujarati literature. Currently, a precious little number of translation works embody R.V. Pathak in English. With all precious little work being done on Pathak, his criticism is almost absent from academic considerations in Gujarati literary studies let alone in English translations. More so, at present in almost all the language Departments at various Universities in the State, R.V. Pathak, though considered stalwart of his time, finds no rigorous representation in so called established academic canons. It is, therefore, opportune, if not late, to translate his representative critical writings into English and thereby contribute to the quantum of literary theory and criticism at present. It is also aimed to establish relevance and significance of Pathak's writings in the current literary discourse.

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