

F.R. LEAVIS AND C.D.NARASIMHAIAH: A COMPARISON PART 1

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ABSTRACT

C D Narasimhaiah, like F.R. Leavis(1895-1978) in England, foster, the conscience of his by projecting an Indian English tradition of literature and literary criticism. This paper(divided into two parts) seeks to convince the reader that C D Narasimhaiah's appropriation of Leavis's key notion is part of his strategy to valorize Indians and ensure their worldwide acceptance.

KEYWORDS: *An Indian English Tradition of Literature and Literary Criticism, Understand the Discipline of English*

INTRODUCTION

It was only at Matthew Arnold's initiation that the English tripos was introduced at the English Universities. Arnold advocated spreading sweetness and light through English literature to humanize the mob. English, which was the poor man's classics during the nineteenth century, was now beginning to be seen as England's answer to philology, which was German in origin. English was not a 'serious' business to the professors of English at the Universities then. It was an act of connoisseurship, not different from tasting different wines, and criticism was good-natured and genteel gossip. The emergence of English as a discipline of thought has been attributed to F.R.Leavis by several commentators. He was one of the most influential critics of the time, whose ideas and thoughts were greatly popularized or historicized and the English teachers become self-conscious about their professions never before. These developments within the discipline had its effect in the Indian academic scenario as were. This helps us understand the discipline of English in India.

Leavis's ideas were introduced and popularized by Narasimhaiah and his pioneering work in India. Leavis focus his attention on Englishness and Narasimhaiah on Indianess. Narsimhaiah was a disciple of Leavis who sincerely promoted his master's idea and tried to fuse his ideology intelligently. Like Leavis, Narasimhaiah also believed in the civilizing influence of Literature and Looking into the Indian scenario until the nineteenth century. English was a foreign language from the west, from Britain. Indian writers were said to derive their ideas, feelings, and the style from the west. They were not exposed to the kinds of literature from many other countries expect perhaps the Soviet Union. It was only after independence that a new horizon was created for the Indian scholars and critics. This was the stepping-stone for Commonwealth literature to come into existence. Only then did the critics start realizing that the literature from other countries was interesting and worthy of their attention. There was an interaction among the critics of all countries and the scholars had more scope to write in their style and ideas. The critics, scholars, and readers started understanding the culture, tradition, background, and different forms of writings. This was the period that Narasimhaiah actively participated in the promotion of Indian English literature and to increase the awareness of other forms of English literature from around

the world. He emphasized the need for critics not to speak in abstraction but to experience a literary work. His views on tradition are similar to that of Leavis. He went beyond these criteria and applied it to the works of literature in English from America, West Indian, Canada, Africa, and Australia and India.

Leavis's main intention was to establish English at the center of all intellectual activity. Leavis's 'Organic theory' reconciled the two conflicting notions of a community; Community as a relic of an imagined past and as well as a real community obtained through a living language, Central to his criticism is the notion of 'life'. He evaluated literary works in terms of this concept. He ran a journal called *Scrutiny* for twenty years, which served as a tool to express his views freely and to convey his influential opinions against that of his contemporary critics. The works of Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, George Santayana, and Ford Madox Ford influenced him the most.

F.R. Leavis believed that a literary critic's business is to create the experience of the artist as it is grasped from the words of the writer. And when the critic offers his judgment on a particular work, it is up to the readers to agree or disagree. This helps the readers to involve in the work of art and come into contact with the broader readership. Literature and criticism also become synonymous with culture. One is reminded of Matthew Arnold here: "The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time..." Thus literature and language become synonymous with culture. Leavis never concealed his idea of "minority culture" and the dominance of the cultural elite in society, as he was a middle-class writer. He defines criticism as a relevant, delicately attentive analysis of a complete response to literature. Arnold felt the need for governance of the state by the middle class to save it from the state of anarchy. To make them able to rule, education to a higher culture is needed. Leavis was thus among a set of writers who invariably made references to an ideal community from the distant past. Most of the writers explored different ways to ensure the position of power for the elite. This formed a sort of background to Leavis's concept of "organic community". He emphasized the loss of this community of rural, agricultural England with its slow and steady replacement by the urban, industrialized, and organizes modern state. Since the other vehicles of tradition which they termed as the family and community deteriorated, one had to depend on language which gave it scope for preserving organic community in however vestigial a form.

Leavis viewed English as a touchstone for all cultural progress and as a subject worth studying if it was to demonstrate one's fitness for civilized existence. He looked upon language as a tool to establish traditions and culture in society. Its key role was felt when the other traditional forces like the family and the community had disintegrated due to the evil effects of the society it could play a major role in providing cultural values. He realized that to uplift the great tradition in society, only the best writers who used language well needed to be studied. To make literary criticism effective, one should be concrete and specific in their thought, not employing philosophy and literary history. To be a good critic one should have an inwardness into the English language. This created impatience and dissatisfaction in Leavis¹. Leavis' emphasis on English culture and tradition is seen throughout his critical analysis. He approves of Joseph Conrad's ability to transcend his origins in becoming English. This gives us evidence of his motives in emphasizing the questions of Englishness, which was the actual need of the nation and of his own need to establish English as a discipline in universities.

¹ Karl Manihaeim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, ed, Paul Kecskemeti, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, pg no;165-82, London.

Though one would wonder as to how a 'keen sensibility' and an exceptional awareness of an artist correlate with what they understand as individuals, Leavis looks to it as strength. One could understand the distinction between 'selfhood' and, 'identity' by seeing the distinction between truthfulness to life and life-like convincingness. When life is mediated by the artist's personal views, it becomes less real. For Leavis, the operating tool to measure the greatness of an artist is the personal-social coalescence. Though the loss of organic community was evident, Leavis felt that through intelligentsia it could be rebuilt or achieved which would reinforce a civilized society in its place. And with this intersubjective circulation of opinions; he wanted to construct his imagined critical community of the third real².

As Leavis was keener on literature, he says it is literature that gives access to inherited wisdom of the race, cultural continuity depending on literature and the literary tradition. He argues that it is in the minority's possession that "the language, the changing idiom, upon which fine living depends".³ Arnold also has recommended the introduction of English to the lower and the middle-class students at the elementary level through the diffusion of culture by 'apostles of equality'. So Leavis propose a program of study of literature through 'practical criticism to develop in the students' abilities to discriminate between the good and the bad. The essential part of the English school in this training of critical awareness. The aim was to produce an educated man, with a humane culture who would be responsible and intelligent about the problems of contemporary civilization. It was believed that only through such efforts could the tradition of taste kept alive. As he believed that the universities were the recognized symbols of cultural tradition, he wanted to reconstruction process to start from there. The aim was to have the English school as the center of 'real humane focus' as the study of literature and language of one's own country was the intimate kind of tradition. He appreciated Matthew Arnold's thought that literature should be seen as a 'criticism of life' and not as 'art for art's sake' and admires Arnold's concept of critical intelligence and critical standards.

Leavis emphasized the loss of this community of rural, agricultural England with its slow and steady replacement by the urban, industrialized, and organized modern state. The same could be observed in the Indian scenario when Narasimhaiah made a significant contribution towards the development of English studies in India when he found that English was on the decline due to the derivatives and non-exposure of the other literature from different countries around the world.

C.D.Narasimhaiah too strongly feels that Indian writers should feel proud of their culture, tradition, and heritage and try to see the positive aspect of life, values to strengthen and to cherish the true spirits with sincerity to themselves and their country. The writers, he feels, are teachers who could show the way for the readers of one's country, enlighten them and see the positive aspect of life without perversion in thought and action towards the country in which one lives. He criticizes Indians for having imported quarrels, ideas, and values that give a pretense of intellectual life and sophisticated drawing-room talk for all this is irrelevant.

Narasimhaiah adored the concepts of Indian critical genius like Bharata, Dandin, Bhamha, Vamana, Kunraka, Anandavardhana, Adhinavagupta, Kshemendra, Rajashekara and Viswanthana, and their terms 'Rasa, Riti, Guna, Alankara, Aucitya, Dhavni and Rasanubhava (the imaginative experience of a work of art)'. He looks into these listed factors as an important criterion to establish Indianness in one's literary work. This new yardstick and the term 'Indianness' was

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1992 London.

³ Leavis, *Education*, pg no 145

popularized by him in India, especially in the Indian English criticism. For Narasimhaiah critics have a 'swadharma', as: "Let me at once comment that this Sanskrit term like many others, has today acquired sentimental associations by mouthing it impotently during the years of our subjection to British rule, instead of revitalizing it through practice in literature and life, for only then could we have absorbed and assimilated what we borrowed and made for organic growth. Such indeed is the working of the organic principle".

Leavis disagrees with the perception of many of the writers within the English tradition, John Donne, Hopkins, Shakespeare, Austen, D.H. Lawrence, and Polanyi are of those he appreciates. He did feel that a poem or a novel was the starting point for a reader as he could be in tune with the author's mind giving free space to their creativity. An insistence on traditional and cultural continuity is seen in Leavis's writings.

Leavis did not accept Eliot's modification of his doctrine of impersonality but appreciated Lawrence for influencing Eliot in this regard. Bergonzi and Bilan have rightly pointed out that Leavis continued to use the criteria of impersonality to judge the greatness of Eliot. Leavis even found fault with Eliot's essay on "Tradition and Individual Talent" and disapproves of "After Strange Gods". But at the same time, he appreciated Eliot's belief in tradition and community. Leavis's theory was that an artist's intensely personal experience has a definite role in the creative process of writing. But he does not refer to the Romantic notion of "spontaneous creation". His emphasis is thus on the individual's contribution to life which surpasses the author. The influence of the community where they live is interlinked here. Leavis says: "The thinking of all great writers, the representatively human quality of genius being inseparable from its intense individuality, is distinctive, involving in each case a marked distinctiveness in the report on the reality that is conveyed".⁴

The parallel between Leavis's judgments, the principles underlying his pronouncements, and C D Narasimhaiah's responses to Indian writers are too obvious to miss. Narasimhaiah praised Raja Rao but showed disagreement with other writers like Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul. He observed Raja Rao's metaphysical novel truly as 'an area of promise' the Indian engagement with metaphysical concern which transcend the limited performance of British and American fiction. Narasimhaiah's perceptive probes into the metaphysical quality of the novel and do well in bringing to light certain important aspects of the work. The metaphysical aspect can be observed throughout the work, which could be cut without injuring the organic structure of the work. Narasimhaiah observes the sharpness of relevance and the implicit irony when Rao says: 'I was born a Brahmin that is devoted to Truth and all that', 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahmin'- the reputation of which occurs in many places in the novel through character and situation. Towards the end of his novel, he condemns the Brahmins for having sold India through the backdoors to the British during the rule of Tippu Sultan. Narasimhaiah sees *The Serpent and the Rope* as reflecting truth, the tradition of India, and its vitality especially in its encounters with west India seen as an idea, not as an area on the map. Rao claims to be a historian with no art or decoration in this novel. He takes courage to deny his own claims to art and call himself a historian. Rao opens his novel with his character as an orphan with a poignant note about his state; the poignancy being personal and metaphysical. Rao has portrayed the essence of life, relationships, bondage, love, affection, sentiment, anguish, hatred, emotions, and death. One wouldn't know how a European would react to such sentiments but these are the stuff with which India is made and by which intellectual India lives. Narasimhaiah says, "A country's culture lives in such insubstantial things as a little gesture, or mere 'recognition'

⁴ Leavis, *The Living Principle*, pg no 49.

without the need for an 'explanation'; and until one can learn to develop an inwardness with another culture by such subtle means, any attempt to dub such formalities, pathetic fallacy would be like running a crude road –roller on a flower-bed, a reflection of intellectual ill-breeding."⁵ Rao's awareness of the Indianess of the expatriates is seen, when he says; "India is not a country like France or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysical one. Why go there anyhow? I thought; I was born an exile, and I could continue to be one. My India I carried wherever I went. But not to see the Ganges, not to dip into her again and again... the Ganges was an inner truth to me, an assurance, the origin, and end of my Brahminic tradition. I would go back to India, for the Ganges and the deodars of the Himalayas, and for the deer in the forests, for the keen call of the elephant in the grave oscillate silence of the forests. I would go back to India, for that India was my breath, my only sweetness, gentle and wise; she was my mother. I felt I could still love something; a river, a mountain the name of a woman... I wished I could be a river, a tree, an aptitude of incumbent silence."⁶ The 'Indianness' that Narasimhaiah claims are the essence of all great works of art produced in Indian thus finds a lucid expression in Raja Rio's statement.

Leavis disapproves any separation between the individual and society, and living organism and its environment. Without an emphasis on individuality, there was no consideration for 'life'. And this life had to be a part of and outcome of the collaborated community culture. Merle Brown describes the process of the development in Leavis's idea of the individual about the community as, "Life, as leavis never tires of saying can be lived only by individuals. But to believe as an individual human being is to be developing as a person, to be struggling constantly to attain integrity, a continuousness between one's inward thought and feelings, one's outward acts and speech and the natural and natural and social situations in which one feels, thinks, act and speaks. Even more important, human creativity depends upon one's developing as a self-world, a person, in such a way that he is openly expectant that he will be impinged upon by other persons."⁷

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⁵ C.D. Narasimhaiah, *The Swan and The Eagle*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, pg no 168-169, Simla, India.

⁶ *Ibid* pg no 196

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