

*Blesses of My Father  
Lakshmangiri....*

B. A English Semester - III

## *Qualities of a Good Critic*

Course in Literary Criticism

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# Qualities of a Good Critic

*Literary criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature.*

## ✦ Introduction

Criticism or literary criticism is the term for studies concerned with classifying, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating the works of literature. Dryden writes in his preface to *The State of Innocence* as criticism was first instituted by Aristotle and which mean to standard of judging well today. The term literary criticism aims at the study of works of literature with emphasis on their evaluation.

Whether or not literary criticism should be considered a separate field of inquiry from literary theory, or is a matter of some controversy. For example, the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* draws no distinction between literary theory and literary criticism, and almost always uses the terms together to describe the same concept.

## ✦ Definition of Criticism

*Criticism is the art of estimating the qualities and characters of literary or artistic work.*

✍ Webster Dictionary.

*Criticism is the art of interpreting art. It serves as an intermediary between the author and the reader by explaining the one to the other.*

✍ Walter Pater.

*Criticism is a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.*

✍ Matthew Arnold.

### ✧ Origin of Criticism

The term “criticism” derives from the Greek word *Kritikos*. It means a judge of literature. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the word changed into *criticus*, which means the interpretation of texts and words.

### ✧ Meaning of Criticism

Criticism is the art of judging the qualities and values of an aesthetic object in literature or in fine arts. It is the art of interpreting art. Criticism is not concerned with the interpretation of life. It is concerned with the interpretation of life as an essay. So, literature criticism is a systematic development of intelligent and adequate reading.

*Criticism is the practice of judging the merits and faults of something.*

Literary criticism is the play of the mind on a work of literature. It consists in answering rational questions about literature. Such inquiry leads to a better understanding of the nature and value of literature.

### ✧ Qualities of a Good Critic

As the best critic of engineering should be an engineer, the best critic of poetry should be a poet. This question has been answered by many great poets who have been critics like Dryden, Goethe, Arnold etc. they have opened their minds to all the literatures with an understanding. They have been able to tell us how the work begins, what its technique is and what its end is.

A piece of literature implies not only a writer but also a reader. There is a voice at one end and a listener to the other side. The critic is a listener who understands what is said to him. A good critic should have the qualities in himself which described under:

[1] A well – read Man

A good critic should be a well – read man. He should have read the ancient and the most modern works of the writers. If he judges an old work, he must think of all the allusions and history, he should have the knowledge of morphological aspects of the language to judge that work. If he judges a modern book, he should be aware of the modern trends in literary criticism.

[2] Knowledge of Human Life

The critic should have good knowledge of the life from which the creative writer has comes out. He must have understanding of what life call itself. If the work is a play or a novel, he must know of human nature and raw materials upon which the theme is built. As *Burk* said –

*If objects affect consciousness, they must be represented because they might affect the artist.*

The critics must be acquainted with the objects and he must have sensibility to ideas.

As *Eliot* says –

*The conscious present is an awareness of the past.*

In short, a critic should be well acquainted with the traditions.

[3] Command over the Language

A literary work of art is presented to the reader in the form of words or images or concepts. The language of the artist should be fully intelligible to the reader or the critic. The critic must have the sense for the meaning of the words whatever it is, a work well done or badly done. The critic may guess what it might have been, what the writer wished to be, it should be much better than it is etc.

[4] Biographical knowledge of the Writer

A good critic should have adequate knowledge of the author's life. This knowledge helps him to explore what is obscure in the author.

*T. S. Eliot* is misleading when he says –

*Personality is not to express.*

Impressions and experience which become important in poetry may play an important part in man's personality; but a critic cannot be indifferent to all these determining force. *Sir Walter Raleigh's* short biography of Shakespeare is a brilliant example of the manners in which a subtle and imaginative critic may actually reconstruct the character of a man by studying his work.

[5] Sharp Memory

A good critic should have sharp memory. As *Arnold* said –

*There should be lines and expressions of the great masters in our mind.*

The characters of high quality of poetry are the touch stones, by which we can measure a work and see if it has a mark and an accent of high beauty.

[6] Creative Experience

The aim of all fine arts is to please. A good critic should have an aesthetic sense to pass his judgment of the work. He should have a creative experience which may help him to bring out the best qualities in a piece of art. *Ben Jonson* rightly called that –

*Judge of the poet is only the faculty of the poets; not of all the poets but of the best.*

It appears that the work of a critic is very near akin to the creative artist.

*Sainte Beure* remarks –

*Poetry can only be touched by the poet.*

The main difference is that the creative writer finds his subject in the same external life around him or internal life experience. The critic finds his subject in other men's book in the world of literature.

✦ **Conclusion**

With all these qualification, a critic can judge the work of any writer of English literature. A critic should examine the work's treatment, its technique, the form and the author's attitude of life. A critic is the voice of the reader. He works like an artist.

*The pen of a critic is more exact than the pencil of an artist.*



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