

Development of Hindi Criticism and the Bharatendu Era

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ABSTRACT

Criticism is the touchstone of literature, determining its quality, value, human sensitivity, and its contribution to societal welfare. The tradition of criticism in Hindi literature began to emerge during the Riti period. From Keshavdas, Chintamani, Bhikhari Das, and Nabhadass, this tradition became more refined in modern Hindi literature. Pioneers like Bharatendu Harishchandra, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, and Acharya Ramchandra Shukla stand as foundational pillars in the development and expansion of Hindi criticism. In the early phase of modern Hindi literature, Bharatendu emerges as a robust and incisive critic, thinker, and editor. This research paper explores the development and expansion of this tradition of Hindi criticism during the Bharatendu era.

Keywords: Criticism, Ritikal, Sanskrit kavyashashtra, Bharatendu Era, Hindi Pradeep, Anand Kadambini, Romanticism, Renaissance, etc.

Introduction

Ever since humans began expressing their experiences through literature, the process of understanding and interpreting it has continued. Hindi Criticism, in its essence, is a creative discipline with a tradition spanning nearly a century. The literal meaning of criticism is "to see." Thus, criticism involves thoroughly analyzing and evaluating a literary work. It helps readers develop a deeper understanding of the text by examining how deeply human emotions are portrayed. Criticism serves as a measure of a work's quality and excellence, determining its place in literature.

Criticism is a natural and fundamental human tendency, providing the perspective needed to understand the world. Humans instinctively seek to comprehend the reality of things, and this pursuit is what constitutes criticism. In Hindi literature, terms like criticism (aalochana), critique (samalochana), and review (sameeksha) are often used interchangeably. The core of criticism lies in the accurate interpretation or evaluation of a work. Credibility is the primary and essential condition of criticism; without it, criticism loses its essence and fails to inspire trust. Rajeshwar writes, "Alochak kisi kalakriti ke prabhav, aaswad aur mulyon ki vivechana karata hai. Vah kavi ke kram tatha abhipray ko praksh me Lata hai. (A critic examines the impact, appreciation, and values of a work of art, bringing to light the poet's intent and sequence.)"¹

A critic is a sensitive reader who appreciates a work of art, evaluates its values, and portrays the emotions underlying the writer's life and actions. A critic observes and understands life deeply. A powerful critique of a strong work reflects the profound sensitivity of both the writer and the critic. Criticism does not distinguish between art and life; it elevates art to the highest place in life. In the words of Middleton Murry, "Art is the alertness of life, and criticism is the alertness of art."²

The seeds of criticism were sown in the early stages of Hindi prose. The literary reviews and criticism initiated by 'Chaudhary Badri Narayan Premghan' were not driven by non-literary motives. In fact, the non-literary elements inherent in literature also hold critical value. At that time, Hindi literature was often referred to simply as "language." Therefore, the values and standards established for the language were not entirely inconsistent. The tradition of commentary (Teeka paramapra) in Indian literature served as the foundation of criticism during this period. However, this was a matter of convenience at the time. Discussions were primarily guided by grammar and classical principles, which likely served as the standards for literary thought in that era. If these are accepted as the standards, the foundation of Hindi criticism can be considered strong. This critical process, which involved exploration and refinement, was further polished with the advent of the Renaissance during the time of Acharya Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, Acharya Ramchandra Shukla's systematic and scientific approach further enriched this process, marking the mature starting point of Hindi criticism.

Criticism has been defined by many scholars. According to Babu Gulab Rai, “Alochana ka arth hai, kavi ki kriti ka samyak drishtiyon se aswad kar pathakon ko us prakar ke aswad me sahayata dena (Criticism means appreciating a poet's work from various perspectives and assisting readers in experiencing that appreciation)”.³

Dr. Ramchandra Tiwari outlines the responsibilities of an ideal critic: “Ek shreshtha alochak apne dayitva ka nirvah karate huye kavya ko paribhashit karata hai, paramparagat mulyon ka punrakhyan karta hai, naye mulyon ki sthapna evm aneek paddhti ki pratishtha karta hai, kavyanubhuti evm jivananubhuti ke sambandhon ki vyakhya karata hai, kavya ke aswadan ka swaroop nirdharit karata hai, avanchhit padhatiyon evm mulyon ka virodh karata hai, kavya vastu evm kavya-shilpa ke sanshlisht sambandh ka vishleshan karata hai tatha kaaljayi kritiyon aur apni priya rachanaon ka mulyankan karata hai (A great critic defines poetry, reaffirms traditional values, establishes new values and methods, explains the relationship between poetic and life experiences, determines the nature of poetic appreciation, opposes undesirable methods and values, analyzes the integrated relationship between content and form, and evaluates timeless works and personal favorites)”.⁴

The beginning of Hindi criticism is traced back to the Ritikaal (Riti period). Keshavdas can be considered the first critic in Hindi literature. Efforts before him in this direction were feeble and cannot be classified as scholarly. In his works 'Kavipriya' and 'Rasikpriya', Keshavdas provided detailed explanations of critical principles. Another notable figure is Chintamani, whose contributions fueled the continuous stream of the Riti period. Chintamani, along with Mammata and others, laid the path for this tradition, which was accepted by later scholars.

During this period, most critical discussions were conducted through poetry due to the absence of prose, which naturally limited the depth of analysis. Those who used prose as a medium for criticism were also unsuccessful, primarily because they lacked the sharp intellect required for criticism.⁵ Moreover, there was no tendency to adapt to the changing forms and emotions of society or to base criticism on evolving literary themes and styles. Instead, critics relied on established texts and engaged in debates over traditional literary principles. The focus remained on analyzing the merits and flaws of works, which formed the core of practical criticism in this era. The criticism of this period failed to establish new values.

After the 1857 uprising, as British rule began, the Bharatendu era emerged, represented by Bharatendu Harishchandra. This period marked the rise of a new perspective in modern India, along with the development of Hindi criticism alongside Hindi prose. Although the tradition of criticism existed in the form of Sanskrit poetics since ancient times, work-centric criticism developed only in the modern era. The Bharatendu era saw the first emergence of criticism. Writers of this period were highly sensitive to their time and society. Bharatendu himself emerges as a comprehensive writer, contributing to all literary genres. His essay 'Natak (1883)', which discusses the brief history and theoretical analysis of drama, marks the advent of criticism. The critical perspective Bharatendu displays in this work is commendable. Nanda kishore Naval notes, “Bharatendu yug me jaise upnyas, nibandh aur padyatamak nibandh ki rachana ka aarambh hua, vaise hi alochana ka bhi. Is aarambh ke piche yug ki avsyakata bhi thi aur angreji sahitya ki pratyaksh ya apratyaksh prerana thi. (In the Bharatendu era, just as the creation of novels, essays, and poetic essays began, so did criticism. This beginning was driven by the needs of the era and the direct or indirect influence of English literature)”.⁶

As the initial phase of Hindi criticism, the Bharatendu era was moving toward growth and development. Criticism during this time is not found independently but appears in the editorial notes, essays, and letters published in journals. This contributed to refining the poetry of the time, connecting it to public life in a new form. Writers of the Bharatendu era primarily focused on drama, influenced by the contemporary consciousness. Bharatendu's perspective balanced both traditional and modern elements, incorporating both Western and Indian dramatic principles. This synthesis gave rise to modern dramatic theory. He writes, “Natakadi drishya kavya ka pranayan karana ho to pracheen samasat riti ka parityag karen yah avasyak nahin hai, kyonki jo sab pracheen riti ya padhati aadhunik samajik mat poshika hogi, vah sab garahan hogi. Natya kala - kaushal dikhane ko deshkal aur patragan ke prati vishesh roop se drishti rakhna uchit hai (It is not necessary to abandon all traditional methods when composing dramatic or visual poetry, as those traditional methods that support modern social views should be adopted. Attention to time, place, and characters is essential in showcasing dramatic artistry)”.⁷ Bharatendu's perspective on social conditions and contemporary tastes is clear in his essay 'Natak Aur Drishya Kavya', which marks the beginning of practical criticism.

Commenting on Bharatendu Harishchandra's critical contributions, Dr. Ramvilas Sharma notes, “Bharatendu yug me ek aor madhyakaleen darbari sanskriti thi to dusari aor aam janata me samajik avm rajnitik andolan ke liye vatavaran taiyar karana tha. Sadiyon se chale aate, samaj ki haddiyon me base huye samanti kusanskaron se bhi morcha lena tha. Yah dusara kaam kathin tha. Nastik kistin kahe jaane par bhi unhone apna marga n chhoda, iske sath hi unhen apni bhasha ke liye ladana tha. ve apne janasahitya ki rachana kachahariyon ki bhasha me nahin kar sakate the. Usake liya janata ki bhasha ko apanana avashyak tha. Kachahari, sarakar aur anaya vishisht vargon ke virodhi hote huye bhi unhone hindi gadya ka ek sthir roop

kar diya. (In the Bharatendu era, there was medieval courtly culture on one hand and the preparation of an environment for social and political movements among the masses on the other. Fighting against feudal superstitions entrenched in society was a challenging task. Despite being labeled an atheist, Bharatendu did not abandon his path. He also had to fight for his language. He could not create people's literature in the language of the courts; adopting the language of the masses was essential. Despite opposition from courts, the government, and elite classes, he established a stable form of Hindi prose)"⁸

Pt. Balkrishna Bhatt in 'Hindi Pradeep' and Premghnan in 'Anand Kadambini' provided detailed critiques of Lala Srinivas Das's play 'Sanyogita Swayamvar'. Hindi Pradeep also published reviews of Bharatendu's play 'Mudrarakshas', Lala Srinivas Das's novel 'Pariksha Guru', and Shreedhar Pathak's 'Ekantavasi Yogi'. In an essay titled 'Upanyas' published in Hindi Pradeep, Bharatendu reviewed Pariksha Guru, praising its language and plot while critiquing its didactic tone.

Three years after Bharatendu's essay 'Natak' was published, in 1886, Balkrishna Bhatt reviewed 'Sanyogita Swayamvar' in Hindi Pradeep, and Badri Narayan Premghnan did so in 'Anand Kadambini'. This marked the foundation of practical criticism in Hindi literature. Just as the modern era began with drama, modern criticism also began with drama (Natak). Renowned critic Acharya Pt. Ramchandra Shukla credits Balkrishna Bhatt and Chaudhary Badri Narayan Premghnan with initiating Hindi criticism, as they thoroughly analyzed the subject matter of reviewed works and discussed their merits and flaws in detail.⁹

Critics of the Bharatendu era introduced the subject matter of the reviewed work and provided critical comments on its facts. They believed that good criticism is impartial, justly evaluating a work's true merits and flaws, encouraging the writer by praising its strengths, and suggesting improvements by pointing out its weaknesses. Writers of this era sought to connect literature with modern consciousness, a reflection of the prevailing national and social conditions. The Indian people was struggling against imperialism, and the literature of the Bharatendu era reflected the emotions of a people oppressed by foreign rule. Criticism during this period was not found in independent books but in journals, which linked critical activities to contemporary issues, adding intensity. Around 1900, journals like Saraswati (Allahabad), Sudarshan (Varanasi), and Samalochana (Jaipur) began publication, consistently discussing various topics.

After drama, the literary genre that most attracted criticism in the Bharatendu era was the 'Novel'. The novel, introduced in Hindi under Western influence, became a central topic of critical discussion due to its foreign origins.

Hindi criticism in the Bharatendu era is significant more for its possibilities than for major achievements. Criticism of any era cannot be separated from its contemporary context and thought. The people of the Bharatendu era, heavily influenced by European colonialism, were struggling for liberation from slavery, which impacted literature. The criticism of this period embraced romanticism while rejecting feudal values. Acharya Shukla writes in Hindi sahitya ka itihās, "hindi sahitya me samalochana pahale pahale keval gun-dosh darshan ke roop me prakat hui, lekhon ke roop me prakat hui, lekhon ke roop me iska sutrapat Bhartendu harishchandra ke samay me hi hua. Lekh ke roop me pustakaon ki vistrut samalochana upadhyay badari narayan Chaudhari ne apni 'anand kadambini' me shuru ki (Hindi criticism initially appeared in the form of merit-flaw analysis, emerging in the form of essays during Bharatendu Harishchandra's time. Detailed criticism of books in essay form was initiated by Upadhyaya Badri Narayan Chaudhary in 'Anand Kadambini')." ¹⁰

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