



CONTRIBUTION OF CDN IN ESTABLISHING INDIAN LITERARY CRITICISM IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to trace C.D. Narasimaiah's contribution to the discipline of Indian Literary Criticism in English (ILCE) as a critic. The names of K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhaiah, M.K. Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee, G N Devy come to mind when we consider criticism of Indian writing in English. Fearless educator Narasimhaiah's efforts were directed towards presenting a quintessence called 'Indianness'. This is what distinguished him as a renowned supporter of Indian tradition and literature in India. The essay attempts to discuss the contribution of CDN with this in mind.

INTRODUCTION

Newspaper The Hindu has referred to CDN (1921-2005) as the "Voice of an Era." Born as a son of small town shop-keeper in Ramanagara, (Karnataka) in May 1921, Closepet (Before independence, Ramanagara was known as Closepet after Sir Barry Close, an army general in the East India Company and a political officer) Dasappa Narasimhaiah, fondly addressed as CDN, had studied English from a local accountant. He was educated at the universities of Mysore, Cambridge, and Princeton to become the luminary of Indian English literature. He was a Professor of English at Maharaja College, Mysore from 1950 to 1979 and its Principal from 1957 to 1962. He had a Rockefeller scholarship at Princeton and a Fulbright visiting lectureship at Yale in the United States. Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah has taught at many Universities in India and elsewhere including Australia, UK, USA and Sri Lanka. He has

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been a Resident Scholar at Bellagio, Italy, Switzerland, Rome, and Hawaii. Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah was one of the youngest Professors who served Mysore University for nearly three decades from 1950 to 1979.

CDN an ardent nationalist, was alone responsible for making Indian literature in English a viable subject of study in English departments throughout the country. As an academic, he attempted to construct the institutional frameworks essential for the creation of a new academic discipline. As a scholar, he wrote extensively about Indian writers such as Raja Rao, Sarojini Naidu, Nehru, and Gandhi. Over the last few decades, he has edited a journal named 'Literary Criterion' to give a venue for debating issues concerning Indian authors and other Commonwealth writers working in English. CDN established 'Dhvanyaloka,' a centre for English studies and Indigenous Arts in Mysore, with the goal of encouraging discussion and debate on literary and cultural issues. His contribution to Commonwealth studies has been widely recognised, as indicated by a felicitation held in August 2004 by the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies which held in Hyderabad.

Prof. CDN received the Rajyotsava award from the Karnataka government in 1987, and the Padma Bhushana from the Government of India in 1990. CDN also had fellowships at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (1968), Leeds University, UK (1971-72), and Texas University, USA (1972-73 and 1975-76). Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka (1979); Flinders University: Australia (1980). He was a Resident Scholar, International Research Centre, Italy (1988). He worked as a consultant for the East West Centre in Hawaii (1974-75 and 1987). Prof. CDN received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Mysore (2001) and Bangalore (2003)

Among the significant works written by Prof. Narasimhaiah are: *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study of his Writing and Speeches* (1960), *Writer's Gandhi* (1968), *The Human Idioms* (The art of Jawaharlal Nehru's) (1969), *The Swan and the Eagle* (1969), *Raja Rao: Novelist* (1993) *Moving Frontiers of English Studies in India* (1977), *The Function of criticism in India* (1987), *Critical Scene : A controversial Essay* (1990), *The Role of Criticism* (1987), "N" for Nobody: *Autobiography of an English Teacher*, (1991), *Essays in Commonwealth Literature: Heirloom of Multiple Heritage* (1995), *Jawaharlal Nehru: The Statesman as Writer* (2001), *English Studies in India: Widening Horizons* (2002) and *Persons, Places and Reflections* (2003). Narasimhaiah has authored works in practically every literary genre from Asia to Africa.1 (p.1)

Critical Contribution:

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Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah was one of the key names in the field of Indian English criticism. For decades, C. D. Narasimhaiah set the bar for critical Indian studies. C.D.Narasimhaiah successfully combines the finest of East and West poetry.

The criticism that Narasimhaiah offers is a hybrid of New Criticism and a candid new approach to the requirement of Indian-English writing. His critical answers can be distinguished from F.R. Leavis' by using a method of re-evaluation that contrasts a severe level of criticism with a certain amount of compromise. The attitude of Narasimhaiah may be summed up as a smart critical attitude on one level and a scholar who is attempting to investigate a blended originality of the East and West on a higher level. The concessions made by Professor Narasimhaiah to Indian-English writers are his assessments of them as the finest English writers in terms of the delicate use of language, a reaction that is always based on a certain line of logic. However, among the main answers to his writings, revaluation, westernised sophistication, and intense "inner" investigation into the language as well as the background of the writers.

With his books and seminars that brought together critics and educators, Narasimhaiah significantly contributed to gaining attention for Indian literature in English. He played a key role in the introduction of Indian universities. During this time, Narasimhaiah actively contributed to the development of English literature and raised knowledge of various English literary genres from throughout the world. He recommended the critics to address F.R. Leavis, an English critic, rather than speaking abstractly. He extended Leavis' criterion and used them for literature from the English-speaking world, the United States, West India, Canada, Africa, Australia, and of course India. His innovative activities in India helped to disseminate Leavis' theories. While Leavis focused his analytical efforts on creating and defining an essence known as "Englishness," Narasimhaiah worked to offer a construct known as "Indianness."

C.D.Narasimhaiah's trips to Australia were eye-opening, sparking an interest in Commonwealth literature. He was able to recognise the similarities between aborigine philosophical musings and Indian perspectives. "Aurobindo in my own nation taught me to reject Aristotle's kindergarden idea of Catharsis and search for the rasa, dhvani, auchitya, vichara to realise through them the purusharthas of dharma, artha, kama, moksha," he said in his D.Litt. presentation in 2005. (2.Dr. T.S. Chandra Mouli's article "C.D. Narasimhaiah's Contribution to Post-Colonial Literary Criticism")

Narasimhaiah had worked with the goal of gaining recognition and fame as a result of Indian literature in English. He grasped the relevance of humanism and uses scientific humanism of Nehru in his book *The Function of Criticism in India: Essays in Indian Response to*

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Literature "For Narasimhaiah, the role of criticism is clarification and progress" 3 (p.no 87). His humanism causes him to be anti-colonial. His objection to imperialists stems from his status as a humanist and patriot. His passionate call for respect for Indian aesthetics stems only from his view that culture and criticism go hand in hand. For him, culture includes one's spiritual experience. As he mentions it in his book *The Indian Critical Scene: Controversial Essays* "It is nearly axiomatic that literature is first and foremost a cultural endeavour... Literature and civilizations have been interchangeable terms..." 4 (p.no 201).

This desire to "Identify" an "Indianness" that is comparable to the Englishness that had been the foundation of the paradigm in literary interpretation and assessment that Leavis had provided with a notable degree of success may have increased Narasimhaiah's interest in Sanskrit poetics. Narasimhaiah was fascinated by Indian writers and commentators such as Rasa, Riti, Guna, Alankara, Aucthitya, Dhvani, and Rasanubhava (the imaginative experience of a piece of art) are phrases used by Bharata, Dandin, Bhamaha, Vamana to Kuntaka, Anandavardhana, Adhinavagupta, Kshemendra, Rajeshekhara, and Viswanatha. He listed them as crucial indicators of Indianness in a literary work. Narasimhaiah believed that critics had a "Swadharma" that they needed to nurture. For the critic, he provides the following definition of "swadharma": "Let me say right away that this Sanskrit term, like many others, today has sentimental associations because we mouthed it ineffectively during the years of our submission to British rule rather than revitalising it through practise in literature and life, for only then could we have absorbed and assimilated what we borrowed and made for organic growth. In fact, this is how the organic principle operates." 5 (Referred from Dr.K. Rajesh s article "C. D. Narasimaiah's views on Indian English Literature")

He also uses the phrase or notion of Purushartha-s, which refers to goals or ideals, in his criticism. There are four different kinds of goals or values: Dharma, Artha (wealth), Kama (desire in general but used specifically in relation to sex and, by extension, love of art and literature), and Moksha (liberation of the self from the bondage of the world). Achieving self-realization is the goal of 'Parama Purushartha', which is the final stage of existence. The criticism of Narasimhaiah depends on this value. He believed that the idea of Moksha and Mukti did not begin to emerge in Indian literary texts until the advent of the Christian era. Most of his critical writings on the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata may be found. He makes repeated attempts to make references to the great Indian epics in his work as an artist. He also uses Pradhanarasa, Rasadhvani, prayojana, and purushartha concepts and words to study and assess modern art. He places emphasis on the reader's need to experience visual pleasure.

He uses in *The Function of Criticism in India: Essays in Indian Response to Literature* Eliot's "The Cocktail Party" as an example to demonstrate what he means when he says that we may

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relate Western literature to our own experience. He describes Celia, the play's central character, as "one who has abandoned life" using terminology from the Indian language, such as Samaja Kalyana and loka Kalyana. Krishna's instructions to Arjuna, which reads: "There is nothing in all the three realms which I seek, yet I must cease to act,"⁶ (p.no 35) is contrasted by Narasimhaiah with Celia's desire to achieve salvation. Through this contrast, Narasimhaiah contends that Eliot's usage of the term "anti-life" for Celia is incorrect since she has chosen to serve the others, which is a challenging type of life.

It's also instructive to note his comment on T.S. Eliot's final words in "*The Waste Land*" "shanthi, shanthi, shanthi": "Not only is it a benediction, but the dominant emotion of *The Waste Land*, the pradhana rasa, is a far cry from the charge that it is a poem of disillusionment, not any more than the Mahabarata, where Santa is the (dominant) rasa".⁷ (ibid.p.no 16)

Therefore, Narasimhaiah's practical criticism supports his systematic claim that criticism that ignores one's value system is certain to be fragmented, irrelevant, if not a pointless endeavour. He exhorts Indian critics to not just be aware of this but to put it into practise (abyasa) when they analyse and assess literary works.

The aforementioned debate simply makes suggestions as to what Narasimhaiah's ideal Indian critic should not do. He or she cannot afford to indulge in the glories of previous literary triumphs or to let Western literature and criticism consume them. His strategy for the English literary critics and readers in India has to be explained in detail.

In his perspective, a comparative study of the literature of the globe is the greatest method to arrive at standards and break up both colonial mentality and provincialism. Narasimhaiah's efforts were geared towards this end. For example, he relates Eliot's comments on 'Impersonality,' 'Objective Correlative,' and 'United Sensitivity' to analogous concepts/terms in Indian poetics. Objective correlative is compared to Bharata's vibhavas, and 'impersonal art' with the key Indian belief that God is the greatest artificer (visvakarma), and that the poet must learn to recite his incantation via concentration (dhyana) and abhyasa (practise) (dhyana mantra). (ibid.p.no.39)

In Narasimhaiah's perspective of the current situation in Indian English literary criticism, the fundamental cause of the problem is the hangover (sort of Amnesia to use G N Devy's term) from the colonial period. We tended to look up to Western styles and then to European styles for our writing and look through their eyes during colonial rule, both of which led to a compulsion that made us rely on Western critical criteria and even values to deal with our



literature and stopped us from exploring other Indian alternatives. This caused mental and creative deterioration, resulting in repetitious art and literature.

This established context for the working team met in June 1984, to formulate a shared poetic and as to how it could be put to effect. To accomplish this, the then-existing poetic framework was adapted to suit India's genius: 1. Preserve our link with tradition and nurture a sense of continuity, 2. amalgamation of the best elements of Western criticism with Eastern. By doing this they intend to be capable of facilitating completeness of response to current works of literature.

Narasimhaiah encouraged and helped to these endeavours through his writings. A pan-Indian poetics is required to attain a specific quality in Indian English literature and criticism. Like individuals, nations tend to look for values when there is a danger to what they live by. This yearning for values resulted in a superficial fight between Hindu revivalism and western imitation. The inquiry focused mostly on religion and philosophy, with religion being important to Indian society and expressed in inclusive awareness. All the forms of art, literature, politics, economics and social change were in intimate touch with religion and Indian culture. However, this was just on the surface and not in depth. Even Sanskrit literature was given greater attention by the British than by the Indians. The British Orientalists who had little grasp of the literary qualities conducted the job of translations of the Vedas, Upanishads and Sanskrit theatre. The job of Indian critics is to bring their actual Indianness to limelight.

Thanks to his global experience and desire to concentrate on the best in east and west ideas, C.D. Narasimhaiah carved a niche for himself as a pioneer who kept the flame of literary appreciation ablaze and helped to found a new class of literary critics. K.R. Srinivasa Lyengar wrote to rationalise the current system in order to support his own position, whereas Narasimhaiah destroyed it in order to support his criticism. The former was straightforward and truthful, while the latter was a fierce critic who maintained amazing perseverance.

To establish a stable place for Indian Literary criticism in English, He has analysed texts and authors from across the globe both Indian and Western. He accomplished this through two methods: (1) applying Sanskrit Poetics and Indian essential philosophical elements to texts, and (2) applying the Leavisian Method and New Criticism's tenets to texts in practical criticism. His work, which was both modest and original, heralded the start of a new era in Indian literary criticism.

CONCLUSION:

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There is a lot of criticism in Indian literature in English. But it has remained the most ignored section. C. D. Narasimhaiah's contribution has considered, in this perspective, as herculean task. He has inspired to form a new generation of literary critics. He is a great believer that culture and criticism go hand in hand. His counsel to Indian critics to return to his own tradition and make literature generate advantages to world literature. Ananda Coomarswamy says, "The main contribution of India to the whole world is just her Indianness". The same way if we ask, what is CDN's contribution to Indian criticism? The answer might be revitalisation of Indianness in the academics. CDN who was Leavisian in his venture earlier, later created awareness of the urgency of going back to India's vital past. As a true scholar, C D N has played an important role in creating a critical climate in India by training the reader's sensibility in his crusade against imitativeness and derivativeness. He has made it possible by pleading for an Indian context by fusing both Western/Eastern and focussing more importantly on Indian Critical Tradition.

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