

Aristotle's Poetics: Revisiting the Legends of Research**Dr. Nisha Singh**

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DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.4.6.10**Abstract**

Research from the time of Plato to this day has passed through several phases and stages, which are interconnected in various subtle and complex ways. The present article aims to revisit these phases at a glance from sixteenth century to the present age. The starting point in this historical survey is naturally a brief reference to its fountain head, namely the literary criticism in antiquity. It basically falls into three heads- 1. Hellenic Period, 2. Hellenistic Period, and 3. Graeco Roman period. Among these, Hellenic period is most significant both intrinsically and historically. In this crucial phase Athens is the most important centre and Plato and Aristotle are the most distinguished and outstanding exponents. Friends the problem of literature and Art is- i. What literature ought to be? ii. What it really is?

Keywords- Criticism, Tragedy, Comedy, Representation, Classical Literature

The problem of literature, art and literary activities is associated with the distinction of the whole activity in proper study. For convenience it is has been divided into two parts- i. What literature ought to be? ii. What it really is? The former point of view is represented by Plato that is mainly concerned with the social function of Art and Literature. It is significant for human being as an instrument for informing the mind and transforming the character of the youthful citizens of the state. He proposes and imposes that literature or research is a pitiless scrutiny and repository of truth and knowledge. The later idea was viewed by Aristotle. He dealt with the idea that research is a scientifically oriented idea concentrating upon the actual nature of poetry and its various kinds, the proper laws which govern them, which is delight and enjoyment. About the close of the third century B.C., Greek culture began to move towards decline and decadence.

The Next was Hellenistic culture most significantly contributed by Alexandria in Egypt. The historical significance of the period is great, as an important link between the first and the last epochs of literary criticism.

The Next comes the Graeco-Roman period when Rome, the capital of Latin Empire, became the centre of new creative energy and added a lot to criticism and literary activity.

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Hellenic criticism is the best represented by Plato and Aristotle. It is, at once, the most originally and historically important and influential kind of criticism.

Focussing upon the concept of research given by Aristotle, we find that he was the first critic, who tacitly took up the challenge of Plato and met the main charges against poetry and drama through a systematic enquiry into their nature, and peculiar influence on human mind and character, was certainly Aristotle, the pupil of Plato himself.

Aristotle lived from 384 B.C. to 322 B.C. He was the most illustrious disciple of Plato. To Indians he is also identified as the instructor of Alexander the great who invaded north-western India in 326 B.C. He is supposed to have inscribed approximately half a dozen critical treatises, of which only two are existing *Poetics* and *Rhetorics*. *Poetics* deals with art of Poetry and *Rhetoric* deals with art of speaking.

Aristotle had the plan of *Poetics*, which is about fifty pages and contain twenty-six small chapters. The first four chapters and the twenty-fifth are devoted to poetry, the fifth in a general way to comedy, epic, and tragedy, the following fourteen exclusively to tragedy, the next three to poetic diction, the next two to epic poetry, and the last to a comparison of epic poetry and tragedy.

Aristotle's main concern is tragedy, which during his time was considered to be the most developed form of poetry.

As far as research is concern it is very confusing as to what should be the chronology of explanation, this paper follows the chronology of Aristotle and explores the concept in a traditional way.

He first talks about the Nature of Poetry and then about its function and its appeal to emotions, and it is followed by the observation of Tragedy, its origin, characteristics, its constituents, its structure and finally the cause of Tragic character. Following this chronology and sequence the paper explores the Aristotle's concept of tragedy.

Aristotle considers the nature of poetic art and addresses poet as an imitator. He tells us that poet is just like painter, who imitates one of three objects –

- (i) Things as they were or are, means what is past or present,
- (ii) Things as they are said to be or thought to be, means what is commonly believed,
- (iii) Things as they ought to be, means what is ideal.

He believes like Plato that there is a natural pleasure in imitation.

That is why a child imitates and learns his earlier lessons in speech and conduct from those around him. He believes that they derive pleasure out of it. A poet or an artist is just like a grown-up child who derives pleasure in imitation. But he also iterates that the poetic imitation is twice removed from reality. He gives a very genuine difference between a poet and a historian. He says that poet relates what may happen whereas historian related what has happened.

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He believes poetry to be more philosophical and superior to history, because it expresses universal pleasure and history, particular truth. Poetry is probability whereas history is recorded.

Aristotle visualizes pleasure as the end of poetry, the very two instincts, of imitation and of harmony and rhythm, from which it springs, are indulged in for the pleasure they give.

He further iterates that poetry directly appeals to emotion, which arouses pity and fear. Pity at the undeserved suffering of the hero and fear of the worst may befall. These emotions are aroused with a view to their purgation or catharsis.

Aristotle believes poetry as an imitative art, and further mentions that it can imitate two kinds of actions – Noble actions of good men and mean actions of bad man. From noble was born the epic and from mean the satire. From these arose Tragedy and Comedy.

Tragedy, according to Aristotle, is an imitation of an action, that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude, in language it should have artistic ornament. By ‘serious’ action he means any tale which can excite pity and fear, ‘complete’ refers to self-containment, with a proper beginning middle and end. It should have organic unity or natural sequence of events that cannot be disturbed. ‘Magnitude’ refers to reasonable length, which is essential condition of beauty and satisfaction.

The artistic ornament and form of action is well explained by Aristotle as use of ‘rhythm’ ‘harmony’ and ‘song’, which are induced occasionally. The form of action which Tragedy assumes, distinguishes it from narrative verse.

The Constituents parts in tragedy are the next in the chronology. He finds six constituents in tragedy, Plot, Character, Thought – these three are the objects it imitates or represents; Diction and Song, are the medium it employs to imitate these objects, and Spectacles is the manner of imitating them.

For structure of Plot he says, is ‘the soul of a tragedy’. The artistic arrangement of its incidents is of prime importance, which he justifies by saying about the three unities – Unity of Action, Unity of Time and Unity of Place.

Aristotle says Plot may be simple or complex. In simple plot there is no puzzling situations that enter into a complex plot, in particular *Peripeteia* and *Anagnorisis*. *Peripeteia* is reversal of situation and *Anagnorisis* is recognition and discovery of the situation. Both of them please because there is element of surprise in them. A plot which makes use of *Peripeteia* and *Anagnorisis* complex and a perfect tragedy should be arranged in the complex plan.

Since Tragedy aims at exciting pity and fear. The choice of a hero is limited to one whose actions most produce this effect in the spectators. His misfortunes excite pity because it is out of all proportion to his error of judgement, and his overall goodness excites fear for his doom. This character is addressed as Tragic Hero.

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Hellenic Criticism which is best represented by Plato and Aristotle, is at once the most original and historically the most significant and persuasive. Its fragmentariness and fine possibility are as superficial as the impartiality and strength of most of its principles and declarations. Its vital weakness, if we may use that negative expression, arises from the fact that it was based upon the knowledge of only one literature and was deprived of liberal outlook which is the outcome of relative studies of different languages.

Plato and Aristotle persisted for centuries the chief motivation behind criticism, both constructive and destructive. The Puritans found in the works of Plato all that can be said in contradiction of poetry and its effect, while the honest followers and students of it were able to discover a number of sound and wholesome principles for thoughtful nature and art of poetry.

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