



THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL AS PROJECTED IN E.M.FORSTER'S ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL AND M.P.PAUL'S NOVEL SAHITYAM WITH A FOCUS ON THE ART OF FICTION: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

*This research paper vehemently amalgamates the discrete strands of the novel, which is eruditely forecasted by the adroit writers. E.M.Forster and M.P.Paul in their critical treatise of the novel. It deftly dives deep into the astute perspectives and principles of the composition of the novel. Both the writers E.M.Forster and M.P.Paul sagaciously have made an effective attempt on the fundamental parts and critical aspects regarding the art of fiction. Eventually, this research paper culminates with a point that the writers vary in their nation, their critical treatise **Aspect of the Novel** and **Novel Sahityani** rather exhaustively and authoritatively satiated the deep rooted stipulation for a theoretical work on the novel.*

Key Words: Critical View, Principles, Perspectives, Composition, Fundamental, Aspects, Novel, Art, Fiction.

It is universally accepted and recognized that E.M.Forster, one of the foremost men of letters of the present century, is widely respected as a superbly fixed star of the literary firmament of the current century recognized with a cult reputation and intellectual accomplishment. In the course of his long life, he is said to have earned an outstanding reputation as a great novelist, brilliant critic and superb essayist, an excellent writer of obvious and distinctive merits being admired and loved alike by his contemporaries and literary successors. Despite the fact that he is not a voluminous writer by any modern standard, his novels like **A Passage to India**, his critical treatise on novels namely **Aspects of the Novel**, his literary essays and short stories. It is nothing but a critical theory on the principles of the composition of the novel.

As an excellent artistic work, Forster's **Aspects of the Novel** is an attempt at sustained literary criticism, which may be considered to be his literary aesthetics and manifesto of fiction. As an important contribution to the craft of fiction, **Aspects of the Novel** is generally accepted as the greatness achievement of E.M.Forster in criticism. It does contain his profound views on what a novel ought to be and the various ways one can look at a novel. Rose Macaulay holds thus:

“... they represent in a sense, his highest feat, for he has really made of this rather tedious topic what is, though with limitations, a good, stimulating and witty philosophic monograph” (P 225).

A few comments given on the back cover of the Penguin edition of **Aspects of the Novel** amply represent the contemporary critical response in a pity manner and it is worth quoting here:

“The effort to see through novels, not round them – that is how E.M.Forster describes the driving force behind the book. He discards the weighty, ‘historical view’, ‘influences’, and ‘periods’. Instead we are to imagine all novelists at work together in a circular room. With this welcome freshness of approach, the author of ‘**A Passage to India** discusses the various ways we can look at a novel”. (P 1).

Forster delivered a course of lectures known a Clark Lectures under the auspices of Trinity College, Cambridge in 1927, which were all published in one volume with the title **Aspects of the Novel**. This volume is a fine illustration of Forster's critical acumen. “It reveals a keen and individual mind and shows that he has read widely” (Krishnamurti 14). It is full of Forster's habitual wit and wisdom. Arnold Bennett observes:

“I say that I have never met this kind of perspicacity in literary criticism before. I could quote scores of examples of startling excellence” (19).



Forster's right to write on the novel cannot be disputed because he is one of the most successful practitioners of fiction. He has, more than anybody else, the required credentials to write on the novel. Having written more than half a dozen novels, he has the mixed experience of being, at the same time, a lecturer, book reviewer and reader of scholarly papers. In every respect, he was best suited for such a critical work, because no writer before and since has written so exhaustively and authoritatively as Forster on the theory of the novel and this originality accounts for the importance of **Aspects of the Novel** in literary aesthetics. A neatly laid out pattern is discerned in the design of the work. It is classified into sections on story, plot, people, prophecy, fantasy, pattern and rhythm which Forster calls the different aspects of the novel. When the Clark lectures were published in 1927, Forster chose '**Aspects of the Novel**' as their title for his own positive reasons. The reason for his choice of the title is suggested towards the introductory chapter where he says:

"And I have chosen the title 'Aspects' because it is unscientific and vague, because it leaves us maximum freedom, because it means both the different ways we can look at a novel and the different ways a novelist can look at his work" (Gransden 10).

It is a title modest in nature and perfectly in harmony with Forster's personality, outlook, tone and approach. Forster is of the view that any chronological study of the novel would hinder its proper understanding or aesthetic appreciation; the reason being, the novel, unlike the other literary forms, defies application of rigid rules. The novel is beyond the rules of literary composition as it is a 'formidable mass'. It is vast and complex like life with one exception. The ups and downs of life and its dryness are not found in the novel. It is a moist landscape hiding certain swamps which might take the unwary traveler unawares. The point that Forster emphasizes through these remarks is that the novel is by far the most complex and hence the most difficult form of art which attempting to define the novel, Forster turns to M. Abel Chevalley, the French critic, who defines it as "a fiction in prose of certain extent" (170). After having adopted the definition of Chevalley, Forster focuses his attention on seven formal but important properties of the novel. The seven aspects he takes up for discussion, are 'the story', 'people', 'the plot', 'fantasy', 'prophecy', 'Pattern' and 'rhythm'. In the second chapter of **Aspects of the Novel**, Forster discusses one of the fundamental parts of the novel, namely story and also the problems it presents to the novelist. Forster regards the story as the first essential of the novel. It is the highest factor common to all novels. The emphasis on character is one of the best known features of Forster's **Aspects of the Novel**. He turns his attention to this aspect in his two lectures on 'people'. The fact that Forster allots two chapters to 'people' is an unmistakable indication of the importance he attaches to characters in fiction. As the actors in the story are human beings, Forster entitles 'this aspect 'people'. People are the persons of the story who act and speak.

The nature of the character is understood from his words and deeds. It is the duty of the novelist to reveal the hidden nature of the character. Novels, according to Forster, are about people and what they do through during life. Forster tabulates the major facts of human life and examines how far these manifest in the characters in novels. Forster's second lecture on 'people' deals with the famous definition of 'flat' and 'round' characters, 'Flat' characters were called 'humours' in the Seventeenth Century. They are sometimes called 'types' or 'caricatures'. They are easily recognizable for they embody simple characteristics to which they adhere consistently. Round characters, on the other hand, are capable of causing surprise. By doing so, they become agents of the plot. A good novel requires both flat and round characters to make it true to life. Forster's differentiation of characters as Homo Fictus and Homo sapiens as they exist in fiction and real life respectively forms the basis of characterization. Characters must flow from the plot and they should not be out of context. Forster's discussion of characters admits of amplitude and scope within the restrictions imposed by art. The touch-stone of characters is their ability to convince and the characters may be true to life or larger than life. But it must conform to the norms of art.

Chapter five of **Aspects of the Novel** is devoted to the 'plot'. To Forster, it is the novel in its logical and intellectual aspect. A well-knit plot is indispensable for a novel. It is, like the story, a narrative of events with an emphasis on causality. This is how Forster distinguishes the one from the other:

"The king died and then the queen died' is a story. The king died and then the queen died of grief is 'plot'. The time sequence is preserved but the sense of causality overshadows it" (AN 93).



In a story, the reader wants to know what happens next. In a plot, the reader asks the reasons for certain developments. Every incident is important in the plot. Surprise or mystery is also a component of the plot. Forster's analysis of plot and story and his observations on the craft and art that distinguish the plot from the story is commendable. Quite interestingly enough, Forster does include two somewhat idiosyncratic components of the novel among the fundamental aspects. They are fantasy and 'prophecy'. He does not try to bring out the niceties and subtleties of these two elements for the comprehension of his average readers. He only describes them as a beam of light which intensifies and illuminates. 'Fantasy' implies 'the supernatural and 'prophecy' means 'a tone of voice' which is the ontological content of the novel implying any of the faiths of the world or the raising of love or hatred or a particular view of the universe. In chapter eight of the **Aspects of the Novel**, Forster calls his final subject as 'pattern and rhythm' which is nothing but the search for beauty in the novel. Truly speaking, there is a close relationship between pattern and rhythm. Pattern is the shape which contributes to the aesthetic aspects of the novel while 'Rhythm' is the beauty found in the unity of the novel. In short, what has to be understood is that the story appeals to our curiosity, plot to our intelligence and pattern to our aesthetic sense. In the concluding chapter, Forster speculates on the future of English fiction.

In spite of the popularity **Aspects of the Novel** has won as an important critical document, it is not considered authoritative. Forster's approach in many places is personal and impressionistic and he has failed to consolidate his critical acumen and judgement into something precise. In the words of E.M.Benson, "It is full of ideas, but these are only just hinted at, given a moment's dubious illumination and swiftly abandoned, and the critic hungry for firm guidance figures Mr. Forster as a will-o-the-wisp light-heartedly hovering over the marshland to which he himself compares the field of inquiry" (P 329). In a word, it may be said that Forster's analysis is selective and he seems to endorse the views of some critics regarding the presentation of 'point of view' in a novel as a fundamental device. **The Craft of Fiction** by Percy Lubbock is quoted as presenting the various points of view. The novelist can focus his characters from within or without or he can do so assuming various shades of attitudes in between these two extremes. **Bleak House** and **War and Peace** are cited as illustrations of these various shades of point of view. Thus, Forster emphasizes the point of view as an essential aspect. "As a theoriser, Forster has the virtue of being frankly provisional; he is without the disabling diffidence which frustrates discussion by its vagueness, but he is also without the intimidating arrogance which seems to defy it" (Gillie 91).

Novel Sahityam by M.P.Paul was considered as a significant contribution to criticism, particularly on the study of the novel. It might be considered M.P.Paul's **Aspects of the Novel**. Falling in line with E.M.Forster's **Aspects of the Novel**, **Novel Sahityam** was found to be a seminal treatise on the aspects of the novel. The only difference is in the languages the former one in English and the latter in Malayalam. Since it was published in 1930, just three years after the publication of **Aspects of the Novel**, **Novel Sahityam** invited the attention of students, critics and practitioners of fiction alike. Short and admirably written, it happened to be still the most authoritative work on Malayalam novels. No doubt, in length and structure, the nature of the subject and the mode of treatment, it bears close resemblance to Forster's work. The most striking resemblance is that both looked into the problems faced by novelists with regard to the different aspects of the novel.

Novel Sahityam was classified into fourteen chapters. The first nine chapters deal with the various elements of the novel, while the last five chapters are studies on the pioneers of Malayalam novels like O.Chandu Menon, C.V.Raman Pillai and Appan Thampuran. Never before was there such a beautiful analytical study made on Malayalam novels. It became a model analytical work for the young writers. Forster in his **Aspects of the Novel** discussed seven important aspects of the novel, but Paul did not deal with all those aspects in his **Novel Sahityam**. He spoke about a few but paid little attentions to the others as there were not enough novels in Malayalam to illustrate these aspects. There was no special significance about the title chosen by him for his work. It was plain and suggested that **Novel Sahityam** is just about the novel and its formal features. Paul in his **Novel Sahityam**, like Forster in his **Aspects of the Novel**, did give nothing but his critical concept of the novel. It is worth considering in this context the eligibility of M.P.Paul as a critic on the art of the novels. He was influenced by the critical views of E.M.Forster whose critical views are bound to be illuminative and informative R.Krishnamurti rightly observes:



“They also enable us to understand what the novelist is striving to do in his own writings and thus constitute the most valuable key to his work” (P 194).

Forster was a versatile genius who came through many fields and ploughed many fields, for he was a short-story writer, a novelist, an essayist, a lecturer, a scholar and a critic-all rolled into one with a comprehensive knowledge of European literature, Forster was therefore, ideally qualified to write on the canons’ of novels authoritatively. He wrote from experience as he had professional knowledge of the art of fiction. Though M.P.Paul, on the other hand, did not have such a comprehensive literary background, his critical acumen never got doubted at all. His critical work, in fact, bears an eloquent testimony to the fact that one could as well be a critical writer without being a creative artist. He is well-read and well-understood from his extensive reading of the different trends in world literature.

Forster’s introduction is in the form of an invocation which is followed by a brief biographical sketch of Clark, the spirit behind the lectures. There is no such invocation in Novel **Sahityam**. Paul directly plunges into the subject. His introductory chapter is on the definition of the novel. He seeks to define the term ‘novel’ before proceeding to trace its origin by offering a simpler definition of novel than that of Forster. It is, according to Paul, a prose narrative of events expressing man’s thoughts and feelings, capable of evoking aesthetic enjoyment. Speaking on the subject matter of the novel, Paul opines that any human situation can be an apt subject for the novel. Love, affection, patriotism, political theories and such other things that have assailed human intellect come under the purview of the novel. Paul classifies novels into ‘historical novels’ and ‘social novels’ on the basis of the subject matter. According to Paul, ‘novels’ differ in their diversity and in the mode of narration. Some are first person narratives, some being third person narrative while some others are epistolary. Considering all these diversities in the subject matter and the mode of narration, Paul defines the novel as a work in prose dealing with human thoughts and feelings capable of yielding aesthetic pleasures. Thus, in the first chapter extensively talks about the origin, development, classification subject matter and features of the novel. Though Paul echoes many of the ideas of Forster consciously or unconsciously, **Novel Sahityam** is more comprehensive and information in the matter and manner of treatment than Forster’s **Aspects of the Novel**. The Second chapter for both Forster and Paul is ‘story’ which is the most important aspect of the novel. As far as ‘story’ is concerned, Forster and Paul arrive at the same conclusion that the novel must have a story, without which the novel becomes impossibility. Forster defines story as “a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence” (*Aspects of the Novel*, 39). He believes in the inevitable connection between story and human life. Though Forster believes that a novel should have a story, he regrets that it does so. M.P.Paul, on the other hand, ungrudgingly accents the story as an indispensable element of the novel. He believes that the novel without a story is just like ‘a dry branch cut off from the tree of literature’. Story, in his words, is a narrative of successive events and he gives as much importance to curiosity as Forster does. But Paul asserts that the events narrated in a novel should fit in with man’s experiences in life. The readers must have the feeling that it is their own story that is being narrated on the importance attached to the story in the novel, Paul differs from Forster. The latter does not give as much importance to the story telling aspect as the former does.

In the third chapter of Novel **Sahityam** Paul makes an attempt to distinguish, between ‘plot’ and ‘story’. Paul regards plot more important than characters. His discussion of characters occurs only in the seventh chapter. If characters are important to Forster, it is plot which is more important to Paul. He allots two chapters to ‘plot’ to indicate that a well-knit plot is as much essential if not more, as the story or characters in the novel. The difference in the priority given to the plot by Paul and to characters by Forster apart, their conception of plot and its significance in the novel are very similar. Paul retains Forster’s definition of the plot verbatim. Obviously, he is indebted to Forster for his definition of plot. In his second discussion of plot in the fourth chapter, Paul talks about the structure of the plot. The chapter is entitled “Plot: the five stages”. The discussion of the five stages is not found in the **Aspects of the Novel**. Forster does not trace the evolution of the fictional plot through the various stages. ‘Exposition’, ‘suspense’, ‘anticipation’, ‘relief’ and ‘resolution’ are, according to Paul, the various stages in the development of the plot. Paul calls them Aamukha Sandhi, Aasanka Sandhi, Prathyasa Sandhi, Vimochana Sandhi, and Nirvahanam respectively.



Chapter five of Novel **Sahityam** is devoted to 'denouement'. The term 'Parinamagupthi', in Malayalam denotes the various means employed by the novelist to hold the curiosity of the reader till the end. According to Paul, there are many ways to intensify the readers' concern. After hiding certain things from the readers and distressing them for a while, the secret is revealed at the end. Paul classifies such secrets into two. Story denouement (Kathagupthi) and character denouement (Pathragupthi). Splitting up the story into fragments and then tying these fragments into a harmonious whole at the end may be termed as 'Kathagupthi'. Character denouement is of two kinds; internal and external. 'Internal Pathragupthi' is caused by the misunderstanding of the nature of a character. An apparently noble man may turn out to be a villain and vice-versa. But according to Paul, profound knowledge of the world is required to portray characters of deceptive nature. Portrayal of people who go about as impersonators is termed as 'external Pathragupthi'. It is achieved by introducing characters as different people at different times. Paul believes that no great skill is required for creating such impersonators. These two devices are used to hold the attention of the readers.

Paul's chapter on 'denouement' is yet another original contribution. He brings to light the importance of an essential ingredient which has escaped the attention of Forster. Another equally important innovation by Paul is the chapter on 'classification'. Forster does not classify novels on the basis of subject matter. Paul, on the other hand, makes a subject-wise classification of novels. On the basis of subject matter, novels can be classified into historical and social novels. Paul calls historical novels in Malayalam 'Aakkayikas' which deal with historical events and personages, whereas social novels deal with social themes. The salient feature of a social novel is its satirical appeal. Another method which can be used for classification is the method of description. In the next chapter on the title 'character portrayal' Paul discusses the importance of characters in the novel by comparing characters with the inmates of a house. The house is the plot of the novel and the simile stresses the importance he attaches to characters. Paul is of the opinion that the chief aim of the novel is to reveal human nature. This is done by the introduction of characters that resemble human beings. On the basis of the importance they have in the plot, characters can be grouped into main characters and minor characters. The hero, the heroine and the villain are important characters. The story is made up of their activities and the minor characters are given parallel but lower places.

Paul classifies characters mainly into two categories: 'complete' and 'in complete'. His division of characters into 'incomplete' and 'complete' resemble Forster's classification of them into 'flat' and 'round'. The elucidation Paul offers for these types is the same as that of Forster. Here also the influence of Forster is evident. The eighth chapter of the **Novel Sahityam**, which deals with didactic elements, presents the aim and purpose of the writer. Just as in other forms of literature, the novel also aims at purification one of the means to achieve this, according to Paul, is satire. **Novel Sahityam** differs from **Aspects of the Novel** in terms of a special chapter on allegory. This chapter offers discussion on allegorical novels. Books like, Bunyan's **The Pilgrims Progress** and swift's **Gulliver's Travels** seemingly amuse children, but allegorically signify something else'. It is often said that style is the man A good critic uses the proper word in the proper place to convey all that he wants to convey and conveys it in the manner he wants it to be conveyed. This special trait is found in Paul as a critic. In the later part of the first half of the twentieth century, when literary criticism on fiction blazed a new trail with the publication of his **Novel Sahityam**.

Truly speaking, the importance of **Novel Sahityam** lies in the fact that Paul wrote when there was no book in Malayalam which set down the fundamental principles of the art of fiction. Novelists were not familiar with these principles. Paul thus fulfilled the long-standing demand for a theoretical work on the novel. To conclude, both **Aspects of the Novel** and **Novel Sahityam** have stood the test of time. Critics and students have found them to be useful handbooks on novels in general. Both the works deal with the problems faced by the novelists with regard to the different aspects of the novel. But they are more than the discussions on the canons of the novel. No doubt, both **Aspects of the Novel** and **Novel Sahityam** may be considered to be very useful books to the critics and students of fiction in all respects, for both beautifully what the appetite of students thereby encouraging them to read more on novels.



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