



RELEVANCE OF ENGLISH ESSAY IN MODERN TIMES

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Abstract

English Essay is Prose genre in Literature like short story, Novel, Drama etc. It originated in France by Montaigne. A few famous exponents of this genre in English are Bacon, Charles Lamb, Jonathan Swift, Addison and Steele and later writers like Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Locke, Hobbes and Rosseau. Essay can be defined as "A short piece of prose writing giving some one's idea of Politics, Society ". In the words of A.C.Benson. "the essay is a little criticism of life at some one point clearly enough defining".



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Introduction:

In this paper Charles Lamb "Essay's of Elia" is special focus. These essays are Lambs contributions on miscellaneous topics, to the London Magazine between the years 1820-1823 and published in two series. Bristone in 1823 and the second series in 1833 The periodical essay declined in the beginning of the 19th century. It paved the way for the emergence of critical journal, commonly called The Review, which was mainly concerned with social, political and personal topics. Among them were the The Gentlemen's Magazine, The Quarterly. At this juncture appeared Charles Lamb, In the Essays of the Elia (1933), Chales Lamb followed the style of rhythmic and eloquent style of Montaigne and Cowley and thus he was called "The Prince of English Essayists". His essays reveal to us his sweetness of heart, pathos humour, and his day to day personal experiences in life which are relevant in modern times. His theoretical and conventional style is not so clear and not easily understandable to common people or ordinary readers. Lamb is amusing paradoxical, ingenious, touching and eloquent.

Lamb wrote essays on different themes. He was quite at home when he recorded his personal experience in his office but he was alive to some of the literary and academic issues

of his times compared to recent times. Through he did not offer piercing critical insights on English literature in general and the literature of his times in particular he expressed his deep felt convictions and opinions on a few literary texts and authors. The following essays belong to this category.

- 1) Oxford in the vacation
- 2) On the Artificial comedy of the Last century, and
- 3) Sanity of true Genius.

Let us discuss these in detail. “So formidable” a judge, A.C.Bradley said of Lamb thus:

“He was the greatest critic of his Age. The estimate is an extravagant, one, the more because what might be called the canon of Lamb’s actual criticism must be gathered mostly from statements made by the way and would make but a slim volume; yet it may serve to suggest something of the effect that the unexpected authority of Lamb’s intelligence might have upon a perceptive and responsive reader”.

In “Oxford in the Vacation” Lamb discusses a few literary figures, who contribute their genius to the world of letters. Here he has devoted half of the essay to the character of George Dyer’s scholarship, his proclivities towards research, his love of creative writing, his absent mindedness etc. This portion of the essay reads almost like a story. The following lines show his excellence.

‘And D. has been under-working for himself ever since; - during at low rates for unappreciating booksellers, - wasting his fine erudition in silent corrections of the classics, and in those unostentatious but solid services to learning which commonly fall to the lot of laborious scholars, who have not the heart to sell themselves to the best advantage. He has published poems, which do not sell, because their character is unobtrusive, like his own, and because he has been too much absorbed in ancient literature to know what the popular mark in poetry is even if he could have hit it. And, therefore is verses are properly, what he terms them, crotchets’.

In these lines, Lamb says that the labour of exploring manuscripts should be left to a man like George Dyer; He (George Dyer) pours over books so diligently that he himself has grown almost into a book. He is assiduous in his visits to the seat of learning like the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Much of his fortune has been spent in his Journeys from his dwelling to these two universities and back. He has been investing into the dispute as to which of the two universities was founded first. The

enthusiasm with which he has been pursuing this investigation has not been shared by heads of colleges and other administrators of the two universities. He looks startled even when accosted by a person of long acquaintance. He is so absent minded that one day he made a second call at a house where he had already called and been told that the occupants of the house were away to the country and were not expected for a week at least. Most of the time he is pre-occupied with his medications and with his imaginative flights.

After a course of hard study at Cambridge, Dyer worked as an usher to a knavish fanatic school master at a meager salary. Subsequently he became an author but without much commercial success. His poems do not sell because he is too absorbed in ancient literature to understand the demands of modern taste. He is a writer of excellent prose.

Lamb concludes the essay by observing that Dyer is delightful anywhere but that he is at his best at such place as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The rivers of Oxford and Cambridge universities are more to him than all the waters of Damascus. He feels most at home at these seats of learning. we find such kind of characters rarely in modern times

On the Artificial comedy of the last century is another literary essay of Lamb. Macaulay comments on this essay .

Its argument was ingenious but “altogether sophisticated” “In the name of art as well as in the name of virtue” he said “We protest against the principle that the world of pure comedy is one in which no moral enters”.

And an eminent American critic the late Joseph Wood krutch, in his comedy and conscience in the Restoration, says thus.

“Lamb, in the view he took of Restoration comedy, had been blinded writers mean by its brilliance... and (saw) only the wit.”

Lamb suggests that the comedy of the Restoration represented manners and morals as they really were and should therefore be understood as offering an occasion for moral judgement. But this is to miss Lamb’s intention, which has nothing to do with the congruence, or lack of it between what is actually the moral situation of the society and the representation of it on the stage, but reaches far beyond that to propose one of the possible functions of art in modern time also.

The following lines illustrate this view of Lamb.

“The artificial comedy, or comedy of manners, is quite extinct on our stage. Congreve and Farquhar show their heads once in seven years only, to be exploded and put down instantly. The times cannot bear them. Is it for a few wild speeches, an occasional license of dialogue? I think not altogether. The business of their dramatic characters will not stand the moral test. We screw everything up to that.

In this essay, Friedrich Von Schiller is the last man in the world to be accused of light mindedness and he took what essentially Lamb’s position is. In his far ranging work letters on the Aesthetic Education of mankind (1795) he says that the “mere play” which is what the experience of art can be and ultimately should be suggests to man the possibility of his freedom, giving him a taste of what it feels like to overcome the earnestness of duty and destiny. It makes the paradigm of man’s true being. It teaches him what he must hope word a human being, and he is only a human being when he plays. Lamb in his own unsystematic way, says the same thing in this essay which reflects the recent trends.

J.Lewis comments thus.

“It might be a good idea to invite people, as a test of their literary sensibility, to say which they preferred, the essays or the letters. Those who pronounced for the letters should be immediately condemned. The letters are merely literature in the act of becoming, The essays are literature in being and are wrought constructed, fortified, by the very perfection of their structure, against the assaults of time.”

In Sanity of true Genius Lamb argues the view that the poet is mad. This is expressed by Plato in his dialogues. Socrates too takes the line that what poets say cannot be constructed as making, ordinary sense and that their utterances are to be understood as the expression is a noble madness. The intention of this view is chiefly ironic, a way of proposing the idea that poetry is not under the dominion of the rational intellect. Plato certainly did not mean to say anything more to the discredit of poetry than that is not philosophy. The idea that the poet does not speak in the voice of reason, or indeed, in his own voice, but is possessed or “inspired”, associates him with the prophet or the shaman through whom a God or a spirit communicates, often in language not comprehensible to human intellect. The madness of the poet became part of popular lore – as in Shakespeare’s. The lunatic, the lover, and the poet poets eye in a fine frenzy rolling. and the (A Mid Summer Night’s Dream). It could, however be used to belittle the value of poetry in an age which, as Lamb felt, was increasingly concerned with fact and practicality even in the modern times.

Conclusion

To conclude we can say The essay is mainly intended to teach things to people, on many subjects of which even the educated classes mostly are not aware of .It aims to inform, enhance , proper understanding, increase one’s vocabulary, teach usage and this in general improve one’s ability to use a language to one’s best advantage. In this context, Essay plays a very important part in the education of people generally and students particularly in enhancing their communication skills and proper utilization of such skills for one’s professional advancement in life.

Even with the advent of C Language and the enormous changes brought by it in the very composition of what we call Language. The Essay is still to be considered important as a basic component and as a corner stone for bettering one’s Language Skills. Thus a sound foundation can be laid by the genre Essay. Even for attaining skills in the modern trends of Language development, specially in scientific and Technological areas.

Again for laying a firm social base for society to built upon, for a stable and sustained development of society on sound principles and to teach such principles “Essay” had done its bit.

The ‘Spectator’ Essays mentioned above have easily sought to do this. The Essays are mainly concerned with **MANNERS, MORALS** and literature. A Society can live without Science and Technology but would it live without morals and upright manners? Moreover Science and Technology create their own frankestins on one side and exterminating weapons on the other. It needs morality on all sides for society to survive under such circumstances. The world today is an Example.

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