

A study on Revisiting the moral perspective on studying fiction

Ramesh Kumar

MA, College of Commerce, Patna

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Corresponding Author:

Email: rameshkumar02101983@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The moral perspective has always been an important part of the literary worldview. It was adopted in Western literary criticism from Plato's virtue-based conception of life and Aristotle's 'high intention,' and it found support from authors such as Matthew Arnold and D. H. Lawrence, who believed that poetry that ignored moral ideas ignored life itself, and from prominent critics such as F.R. Leavis, who argued for literature's moral power. The works of Nobel Laureate and postmodern author Gabriel Marquez show that the moral imperative has not been entirely eclipsed, even though magic and imagination are the focus of most readers' attention in his works. Nora Hamalainen's Literature and Moral Theory (2015) is an excellent academic resource for this topic, as it demonstrates both the continued relevance of the moral perspective it promotes and the necessity of literature in the modern world. Within the context of this paper, "literature" refers to a wide variety of fictional works such as novels, short stories, plays, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Focusing on human values and how they influence the work of creative authors is at the heart of the moral approach. It is thought that by taking a moral stance when analysing literature, we might gain insight into the works themselves and also find solutions to the societal rifts that have contributed to the so-called "crisis in values" of today. Unfortunately, the confusion has been exacerbated by fashionable, unstable literary theories, in particular postmodernism, which was supposed to inject new life into the study of literature but instead ended up confusing readers with its flowery language, disregard for human "virtues," and disregard for any stable view of truth. Therefore, the 'end of theory' has been declared. Because of this, the recommendation to reevaluate the moral approach to appraising literature is a return to the fundamental premise or basis of creative thought. The reason of the current crisis, and the means by which truth and fundamental values might be reasserted in the face of a vacuum of leadership and the resulting moral anarchy, may be found in the progressive decline of the moral approach.

Introduction

In literature, morality refers to rules for determining what constitutes right and immoral behaviour, based on conventional wisdom. On the other side, aesthetics is concerned with how something is aesthetically pleasing. It was Plato, the great student of Socrates, who was the first critic and moral philosopher to reject poetry on the grounds of truth and morality. He argued passionately for art's righteous duty to inculcate morals via expression. Poets were on the list of people he wished to be exiled from his utopian city. To paraphrase what he says in The Republic: "The tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice distanced from the king and from the truth." Nabergoj, 54. Consequently, he reasoned, the poets who lied had to go away. In his estimation, poetry should be evaluated according to its morals rather than its aesthetic value. In Book III, Plato explains why poetry is important in shaping character: "... because omissions and the failure of beauty in things badly made or grown would be most quickly perceived by one who was properly educated in music; and so, feeling distaste rightly, he would praise beautiful things and take delight in them and receive them into his soul to foster its growth and become himself beautiful and good." (Plato 3.401e) A beautiful work of art, in Plato's view, has the power to move people to a higher plane of being. Aristotle's reasoning and common sense led him to disagree, and he came to believe that aesthetics and ethics are distinct spheres of study. Although Aristotle

discusses poetry's serious function, the master was more imaginative than rational, therefore this was a little departure from his moral sense. Perhaps this was the turning point when ethics began to diverge from beauty. If morality is considered in isolation from aesthetics, then it may be that morality lacks beauty. If aesthetics appeals to the senses, then to what does morality appeal? This disconnection raises a fundamental question. It challenges Aristotle's assumptions about the boundaries between ethics and aesthetics. Many critics and theorists embraced the novel idea and expanded upon it in various ways. Aesthetics, in Aristotle's view, appeal to the senses, but morality concerns the soul, which is seen as the unadulterated source of motivation for human beings. It suggests that poetry has a double purpose, luring both the body and the spirit. It's a sign that people are starting to lose sight of the fact that morality has an artistic dimension. In his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats emphasises the inseparable nature of beauty and truth." (Keats 116)

Mathew Arnold later adopted Aristotle's view of poetry as a serious endeavour. According to him, poetry's true brilliance can be found in its big form and emphasis on serious, honest subject matter. This is from his work titled "On Translating Homer." "But let us try what can be stated, limiting ourselves by citing examples. It seems to me that the big style in poetry emerges when a noble character, lyrically inclined, handles a serious subject with simplicity or severity."

Reference: (Arnold, On Translating Homer, p. The grandness of a poem depends on more than simply its author's noble character; the poetry's subject matter must also be serious and sublime, exploring the ultimate truths of existence.

Arnold was convinced that tradition had provided the groundwork for modern literature and that it would continue to serve as an inspiration for future generations of writers. He highlights the ramifications of scientific advancement, which resulted in materialism and self-interest, and the spiritual emptiness of the age. As a result, the many heroic figures from classical literature are rarely depicted. Arnold argued that the spiritual void of modern life meant that present themes lacked the sublimity and seriousness of works written in previous eras, and he advised contemporary poets to look to the past for inspiration. He criticises how Romantics, in their pursuit of "newness," ignored the Classical authors in favour of "diversity. Romantic poet Shelley, on the other hand, argued that poetry should have a moral purpose. It is Shelley's contention in A Defence of Poetry that "the main tool of moral good is the imagination," and that poetry "administers to the effect by acting upon the cause." According to (Enright and Chickera 137)

As with Plato, Leo Tolstoy calls for the exile of the likes of Shakespeare, Moliere, Dante, and Beethoven on the grounds that they were incapable of producing "real art." "Either art evokes in men those feelings which, through love of God and of one's neighbour, draw them to greater and ever greater union, and make them ready for and capable of such union," Tolstoy writes. "Or art evokes in them those feelings which show that they are already united in the joys and sorrows of life." (From Tolstoy's What Is Art?) 166)

D. H. Lawrence, in contrast to the aestheticians, held the view that art and life are inseparable, with the former serving as a vehicle for the latter. According to him, a novelist shouldn't focus solely on writing novels, but on living. He claims that the man who lives and the man who produces are the same person. To put it simply, art is only there to help us get closer to the ultimate goal of our existence by highlighting the fullness of our lives. Consequently, Eliot's usage of the term "aesthetics" loses all of its significance. The way Lawrence expresses it is "The primary purpose of art is ethical. Nothing to do with art, decoration, or leisure. but ethical. Morality is art's primary purpose. However, the morality is not overt but rather implicit and stirring. A code of ethics that affects the body physiologically rather than merely the brain. Alters the bloodstream initially. The thinking process comes along thereafter. - (Lawrence 184). According to Lawrence, morality is not a given but rather something to be discovered. The word "discovery" suggests that morality can be uncovered while reading, even if the author makes no attempt to infuse it. In the next sections, we'll go deeper into this concept.

Leavis made an effort to connect art and reality in his book *The Great Tradition*. This was a hot topic among the critical community, but he stuck to his guns. F. R. Leavis writes on Jane Austen in *The Great Tradition*, saying, "her interest in 'composition' is not something to be pushed over against her interest in life; nor does she offer a 'aesthetic' worth that is

distinct from moral meaning." Her work's organising and guiding concept is an intense moral interest in life, which is first and foremost a preoccupation with particular challenges that life imposes on her personally. (Leavis 16, 17) Since art is nothing more than a depiction of life, the statement is correct.

Leavis mentions Johnson's introduction to Shakespeare as well. "He sacrifices virtue to convenience and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral intent," Johnson says about Shakespeare. He does not make a fair distribution of good or evil, nor is he always careful to show in the virtuous a disapproval of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance; however, a system of social duty may be chosen from his writings, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; however, his precepts and axioms drop casual To wit: (Johnson 473) As a result, critics have always stressed the importance of a moral perspective when reading literature.

Even in the Postmodern Era, there are still those who advocate for a harmony between art and daily life. With the current state of affairs in mind, it is more important than ever that these be heard loud and clear. Nora Hamalainen's new book, *Literature and Moral Theory* (2015), examines how literary works influenced the evolution of the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. The book argues that moral philosophy is essential. To paraphrase what she says, "literary works have their own ways of producing moral and theoretical generalisations that need to be taken into consideration when analysing the moral impact of a literary work." As quoted in Dotterman (242) In light of this, there are critics in the modern literary community who stress the importance of literature to a country's moral fibre.

There have been numerous more contemporary literary critics who have emphasised the importance of literature to the moral improvement of humankind. "Literature... gives fodder for the evaluation of life," writes James Farrel. "It is one of the instruments that work toward moulding and remoulding the human consciousness because it makes the reader more acutely aware of the problems of life, the predicaments of people, the possibilities and limitations in the living, the diversity in human experience, and some of the meanings, potential and actual, in this human experience." quoted in McKean, Chapter 13. "As per all the didactic theories available," Bhate writes, "literature is not a light-hearted activity aimed just to enthrall and entertain with mere play of words, but a serious and significant activity with direct impact on person and society through its deep-seated values." (Bhate 126). This demonstrates the importance of moral education in shaping character. "The distinction between great art and good art [depends] immediately, as regards literature at all events, not on its form but on the matter," says Walter Pater. "Good art...[is] devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, on the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentation of new or old truth about ourselves." (Pater 38)

Of course, literature may teach us a lot about the world and ourselves, but authors might not necessarily set out to teach. A writer is not allowed to subtly or overtly preach through his writing. Still, as a member of the human race and the culture to which he belongs, he can't help but reflect aspects of his own life in the actions and motivations of his characters. Sometimes, without even realising it, he puts his characters through trials that he himself may have endured in his past works. As a result, moral instruction might not be literature's primary concern. Instead, it is discreetly attempting to reorient life's moral concerns. Without being overtly "pedagogical," it provides a philosophical analysis of life's moral concerns. Only when authors and readers work together actively toward this goal will change occur. The purpose of this section is to discuss the part that authors and readers play in this.

With the rising complexities of today's world, when worldly concerns have taken precedence over spiritual ones, it's more important than ever to remember the timeless principles that underpin a happy and content existence. There is no doubt that man is expanding his knowledge and understanding, but his focus has become so narrow on the physical that he has forgotten about the spiritual. Due to this conflict, people have lost sight of the values upon which their own survival depends. Authentic principles transcend time and space as well as cultural, religious, and social boundaries. These fundamental principles have been used by man ever since recorded history began. Man is the perfect expression of these virtues; he is inherently kind and innocent. The wisdom and comfort of these ageless truths have attracted people from all walks of life and throughout all of history. No great thinker, holy man, eloquent orator, or imaginative author can take credit for the existence of moral principles; they have always existed, and will continue to exist, independently of any human.

To limit the study of values to a specific time period or literary style would be inappropriate because moral decline has always been a pressing issue. Writers have been discussing reform, either explicitly or implicitly, throughout history. There has been a value crisis in every epoch, albeit their severity has varied. Personal growth is the key to solving these problems. Although individuals may come and go, certain ideals remain constant throughout history. While many of these lessons can be learned through direct experience, reading great works of literature is the most efficient and straightforward approach to acquire the knowledge necessary to start living a life filled with joy and fulfilment. Given the current state of values in society, literature must play a significant role in reviving long-lost ideals.

Facts and people from real life often serve as the impetus for fictional works. There is no denying the artistic merit of this. But its ethical significance is not to be underestimated. Literature, according to McKean, can show us the way to happiness. This is according to research conducted by McKean (McKean 14). Literature provides the seeker with a wealth of advice on how to live a good life and find fulfilment. He goes on to say that literature's moral qualities are what set it apart from other forms of art and that they are just as applicable to literature as they are to real life. (McKean, p. Since we develop sympathy for the characters by seeing

ourselves in their shoes, this method of learning is the most natural and straightforward of the ones we've studied so far. Along with them, we experience the full range of human emotion and expression, from laughter to tears to new insights and ultimately, personal development. Comparatively speaking, this method of acquiring moral principles is easier than learning from personal experience or the suffering of close relatives. That's why literature has such potential as a tool for positive change in people and communities.

This paper begins by discussing the values problem in the Post-Truth period and the power of literature, especially fiction, to affect personal and societal change. Next, we'll talk about how the author's own moral compass and goals factor into this effort. Whether or whether the author intends to teach a moral lesson, the topic of moral perception is discussed. Finally, the function of fiction and the procedure of value transfer are discussed.

Significance of the study

It is necessary to discuss the depth of the issue in terms of the decline of values in modern times before moving on to an examination of the role of literature in re-establishing values.

This age is a crazy race of demands and unrestrained goals, in stark contrast to the simpler, healthier times of yesteryear. The search of peace and harmony has taken a second seat to the accumulation of material wealth as the primary motivation for modern man. Nowadays, there is a wide gulf between "The Truth" and "My Truth," which is a defining characteristic of our day. Peace and harmony in one's personal and societal life are made possible by adhering to "The Truth," which is the sum total of the essential principles of life as conveyed by our ancient seers and sages through texts. When someone says, "This is my truth," they mean that they have reinterpreted "The Truth" to suit their own needs. Humanity as a whole has drifted away from everlasting principles, destroying its harmony and tranquilly in the process. By substituting 'The Truth' with 'my truth,' we demonstrate that the truth that promotes harmony and contentment for all people has been twisted or misconstrued for selfish ends. The hallmark of the Post-Truth era is the shift away from "The Truth" in favour of "my truth." Because of pride, modern man ignores the timeless truths shared by religious leaders from all walks of life and throughout history. In addition to individuals, nations exhibit these traits as well. People's actions and attitudes reveal the depth of the moral character disturbance at every level of society and the nation. There is a long history of nations creating literature and altering history to promote or justify their policies. Thus, literature is written to persuade a specific demographic. The Quran, the Islamic holy text, has been changed or misconstrued to promote Islam's superiority over other faiths as an example of such a method of brainwashing. The wisdom and truth contained in the scriptures are thus being tampered with in the name of innovation. And with a hidden agenda of appealing to taste and advancing self-interest. In their pursuit of ever-greater profits, corporations will go to any lengths, including the fabrication of facts, to market their phoney goods and services.

The objective of living is to gain insight into the universal truths that reveal the foundational principles that guarantee long-term contentment. To do this, man has to have a clear vision, which can be attained by a never-ending quest for knowledge or through the reading of works of literature that present a vision of "The truth." Truth is not something that can be conjured up; rather, it is something that must be realised. It is possible to fabricate a lie. Why shouldn't literature be used to shape human ideals if it may become a tool in the hands of tyrants, immoral businesses, and other avaricious bodies? Literature is created for diverse purposes and frequently for specific readers. Not all literature is created equal when it comes to upholding ideals, yet one's approach to literature can be altered or improved so that it provides the finest possible recipe for living.

Writer's approach to values

In modern times, the most important job of writers is to remind people of the basic truths of life so that values can be put back into the world. It's not that writers in the past have never done it; in fact, the early literature was mostly concerned with moral issues. Literature has always been used to teach people moral lessons and make them better people. The writers preached directly and pointed out the moral problems in people and in society as a whole. Since society's moral standards have dropped so much, this kind of direct teaching is no longer popular. Many literary critics agree with the idea that direct preaching kills the beauty of a piece of writing. They have good reason to think this, because some people say that values shouldn't be taught directly because it could lead to instant disinterest. When the mind is off, the direct approach can sometimes seem too blunt and ineffective. The recipe works if the values are wrapped up with a story, style, and good looks as bait. This is why moral lessons in literature work best when they are told in the form of a story, parable, or fable. Stories are a great way to teach values to young children. The same method can be used with adults who won't listen. In this way, a novel can be the best way to send a moral message that isn't too obvious but still gets the point across.

Later, direct didacticism was replaced by showing a mirror to society by showing a realistic picture of society with all of its details and truths. Shakespeare's plays tell us a lot about what it means to be a good person because they look at human nature in such depth and detail. On the surface, you can't say that his plays teach lessons. They give a deep understanding of human nature and how it changes over time and with experience. They also let readers use their discrimination skills to see themselves in the characters and situations. His plays explain how complicated life is so that we can figure out what's important. Humor has also been used to make fun of the bad things people do. In this way, some writers just show life as it is. There doesn't seem to be any moral to their stories, but they still say a lot through them. In a novel, the people who live there are almost like real people. Like people in the real world, they have both good and bad points. The reader is likely to see himself in some of these characters and find similarities between his life and theirs. As people, no character is either completely good or completely bad. A person is made up of many different shades. In the end, the good always win and the bad always lose. When the good people suffer and the bad

people do well at the end, the reader's moral sense comes to the fore. Gardner wrote in *On Moral Fiction*, "A man writes a novel to find out what he can honestly maintain, not just with his head but with all of his nature. He gives it to people not only to entertain and teach them, but also to back them up if they are already the right kind of people and make them doubt themselves if they aren't." (qtd. in Tanner 1)

Some writers only wrote in a way that appealed to their senses. They make the epics, which are full of truth and morality, seem more exciting and less important. The *Shiva Trilogy* by Amish Tripathi and his other books based on the *Ramayana* and other epic stories are examples of this kind of work. Chetan Bhagat, for example, adds shocking details to its stories to get young people to read them. Here, writing is all about making money, and sales are more important than social responsibility. People who don't know better fall for this kind of "catchpenny" writing, which can be addictive and harmful. It takes a lot of work to pull readers away from such a feast and teach them to tell the difference between good and bad writing. Critics' honest reviews, which show how this kind of cheap content can damage the minds of young people, can be helpful. Even this kind of writing can teach something to a reader who is paying attention, but this kind of reader is becoming rare.

The Reader's approach to morality in literature-

In the midst of a variety of available books, it is necessary to align the reader's perspective in order to approach literature. It depends on the reader whether he discards the book after reading it or keeps it in his library for future generations. The strategy is crucial here. If a reader has an eye for the good and moral, all forms of literature can serve as a source of moral and ethical instruction. The fiction of the twentieth century is possibly the most widely read and morally difficult to comprehend. To aid readers in navigating the moral maelstrom of the contemporary book, a perceptive critique is indispensable. Every fictional character has a certain worldview. The reader is capable of deducing "The truth."

The ideal method of training readers is to assist them in selecting quality reading. At this point, the job of reviewers becomes vital. Thus, consistent exposure to quality literature can sensitise and harden readers to negativity. A subtle direction on the back cover can give their reading a moral dimension. Thus, it is essential to comprehend how a reader absorbs the lessons in "the truth."

Fiction and the Values

A novelist is a man who resides among others and is enthralled and moved by their emotions, including their joys and pains, hopes and fears, acts, and passions. His experiences, moral development, and maturity are all unique to him. He must have gone through the same moral struggles and tribulations as other men since he is aware of the intricacies of life and is alive to them. His moral perspective, shaped by his experiences, permeates all of his books, and as a result, the characters and events in them subtly convey his vision and message. It's not necessary for a writer to use a didactic tone to share his experiences. Even the simplest depiction of life in literature contains a moral component. Fiction's moral dimension is concerned with issues of right and wrong. Life is

not in black or white, but rather in various combinations and permutations of these two hues. A sincere novelist accurately depicts life. Furthermore, the relevance of moral law will be made clear in any accurate depiction of life. Thus, ironically, a book that emphasises negativity can also expose moral realities about life. It can be challenging to pinpoint values in today's complex world of nuanced relationships and emotions. However, a sensitive reader can detect these values through a careful moral reading because they are permeating the text like a faint moral fragrance.

Conclusion

The current age's rapid decline in values can be attributed to the widening chasm between "The Truth" and "My Truth." The lost values can be understood and restored through literature in both a therapeutic and diagnostic manner. It can

guide a person from his or her personal perception of truth to "The Truth," which is the only true and lasting source of contentment and satisfaction. One can embark on a transformational journey by reading literature, which can spark contemplation. In this sense, fiction can be quite important. Although the novelist may not be aware of the moral intent behind his writing, readers are typically sensitive to moral allusions and aware of them. In order for the reader to read fiction while maintaining an upright angle of focus, this awareness surely requires a certain amount of orientation towards the reader's perception. While aesthetics add to reading's appeal, their long-term effects might not always be certain. On the other hand, the reader develops spiritual maturity and ultimately long-lasting enjoyment when he examines the everlasting truths in literature.

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