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14 THE BANGLADESH OBSERVER

BREAKING through the gobbledegook of English critical jargon here is a beautifully produced paperback publication that is of unquestioned usefulness to students of English literature at undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate levels. The main contribution made by the work lies in the fact that it makes extremely readable and easily comprehensible what has long been difficult to read and comprehend particularly for English literature students of the non-English speaking part of the world. Without being extravagantly ambitious geographically, we can say at least students in our part of the world (Bangladesh and neighbouring countries) will be benefited by such a work on the same scale as the Arab students for whom it is explicitly intended by the authors.

Problems faced by non-English speaking students of English (language and literature) are mainly two :

One taking up honours in English literature at the graduate level or going in for post graduate courses in the same, they are precipitated into an immense area of literary studies and assessment with little or no prior mental or intellectual preparation. That they should be literally at sea in such circumstances is not only understandable but is also corroborated by years of experience of any good teacher of English at higher academic level. Two thus hurled into an uncharted world of literature and literary criticism they are left with the only choice of picking up what their predecessors had done, chiefly to pass an examination.

Needless to say the teachers concerned have also a share in the same. Directing as they usually do the students along the traditional line of dealing with their literary problems through suggestion or at the university level for instance by giving them an imposing list of standard critics and their works. This expedient however only com-

Understanding Literature

pounds and complicates the basic problem proving particularly for middle calibre students, a last straw. The result generally is a wild goose chase for the majority of students. And among the negative after effects of the same is a state

A Guide to Literary Criticism
by Syed Sajjad Husain and
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of chronic confusion which becomes endurable only because of its chronicity there being serious efforts made by any one to help solve local problems with a local initiative and enterprise based on a firsthand experience of the problems and difficulties of the students.] This being the position as was have said so far as non English speaking students are concerned the present work has been avowedly designed to help solve these problems by making literary criticism an attractive occupation for its young students. It is only when you know and understand on your own what you are at that it becomes

work lies exactly in this that it is a concerted and serious attempt at helping students with a solution of their literary problems with more understanding and confidence.

Divided into four parts the book covers practically those essential aspects of literary criticism about which the young stars knowledge is at best hazy. The chapter on definition, for

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interesting. Knowledge making for love is true not only in our life but also in all pursuits including study literature or true appreciation of its beauties.

The appeal of the present

example compresses within 106 pages a whole story of literature that is as concise and to the point as it is easy and pleasant reading.

The precision and verbal ease with which the definitions have been given is expected to illu-

minate as it were by a new lamp the whole of an otherwise murky shadowy horizon.

In part II under Historical Development of Western criticism the resume of critical evolution from Aristotle to Matthew Arnold put across so readily would provide the now rather confused student with a key to much very useful information and critical sequences that one often takes a whole life to put together on the basis of separate books on the respective literacy eras authors etc.

Last not least Chapters III and IV:

Analysing poetry and appendices:

Analysing Poetry a 21/2 page discussion on poetry followed by typical illustrations is itself an imaginative work of merit in that one of the most difficult of evaluation jobs in literature has been put in perspective, which will enable even a student of moderate understanding to assess a piece of poetry on his own. The quoted poems followed up with critical discussions constitute a practical demonstration on critical lines that will be of special help to a beginner trying to separate the different genres of poetry and understanding the function of critics and criticism in relation to them.

As helpful as if no more helpful than are the concluding Chapters: IV. Glossary of literary and Historical terms.

Figures of speech and Table of Major Western works are a positive contributions to the understanding of English and thus literature. The table is entire European literature scene at a glance. One cannot appreciate it too highly.

In conclusion, all things considered here a critical primer or handbook which though it does not purport to be either a literary history or otherwise elaborate and exhaustive is nonetheless worth all the labour that went into its making and all the attention it deserves from all students of literature including those who are now teaching it or will do so in future.

—K. M. A. MUNIM