

**RESEARCH PAPER****Research in Literature: Its State and Various Dimensions****Priti Verma**

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Email: priti-verma018@gmail.comReceived: 7th May 2017, Revised: 22nd May 2017, Accepted: 25th May 2017**ABSTRACT**

Earlier, the word 'research' had the same meaning as the words like remake, reunite or rearrange. But in the modern times, the term 'research' has assumed a new meaning and dimension. Now it has become purely a technical term which means a systematic study or investigation in a field of knowledge to discover or establish certain facts or principals. It also denotes a fresh approach to a subject or interpretation of facts. In Science, research is carried out by 'doing'; whereas in Humanities, it is carried by 'investigation'. Generally, literary research begins with selecting a specific research topic. It is followed by collection of data where the primary and secondary source materials are consulted and information is collected and examined. Related concepts, theories and previous research findings are reviewed. The available data is then analysed and interpreted. As all branches of knowledge are inter-connected and inter-related, a researcher can not develop a critical and analytical insight unless and until he has a basic and an elementary knowledge of different fields. The aim of literary research is to develop the powers of understanding and appreciating literature by broadening the mind and sharpening the critical and analytical insight of the research scholar that helps him in creating new theories and concepts.

Key words: literature, research, methods, skills, interpretation, analysis, comparative

INTRODUCTION

The English word 'search' means to seek, examine or inspect something closely and carefully in order to find something meaningful. The word 'research' has been coined by the addition of the prefix 're' which means again, and so research means to seek again. But in the modern times, the term 'research' has assumed a new meaning and dimension. Earlier, the word 'research' had the same connotative meaning as the words like remake, reunite or rearrange; but now it has become "purely a technical term" (Sinha: p.1) which means a systematic study or investigation in a field of knowledge to discover or establish certain facts or principals. It also denotes a fresh approach to a subject or interpretation of facts. In Science, research is carried out by 'doing'; whereas in Humanities, it is carried by 'investigation'. Various definitions of research help us to understand the term in a more elaborate and comprehensive manner. According to New Standard Encyclopedia, research is "a systematic investigation for the purpose of gaining new knowledge" (p.173). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary mentions that "research is a careful study or investigation especially in order to discover new facts or information" (p.1073). Webster's International Dictionary states that research is "a studious inquiry or examination; especially critical and exhaustive investigation or experimentation having for its aim the discovery of new facts and their correct information, the revision of accepted conclusions, theories, or laws in the light of newly discovered facts, or the practical applications of such new or revised conclusions, theories or laws" (p.1930). Joseph Gibaldi says that research is the "intellectual challenge of pursuing a question that interests you." He further says that research is "an adventure, an intellectual adventure rather like solving a mystery: it is a form of exploration that leads to discoveries that are new" (p.1.2). Thus, research is supposed to develop knowledge and promote inquisitiveness.

RESEARCH: ITS PROCESS AND VARIOUS FEATURES

Generally, research begins with formulation of the research problem and selecting a specific research topic by formulating hypothesis. It is followed by collection of data where the primary and

secondary source materials are consulted and information is collected. Primary sources for research in literature includes literary works of the author; autobiography; articles in newspapers, magazines and letters; discourses; data collected through surveys and interviews. Secondary sources consist of articles in journals, books, anthologies, critical books on the author, conference proceedings, magazines, e-articles and websites. Available literature is examined to get acquainted with the selected problem. Related concepts, theories and previous research findings are reviewed. The available data is then analysed and interpreted. Thus, research methodology is a systematic, step by step investigation, which means that the entire procedure of the investigation is carried out under certain rules and principles, where the researcher tries to explain the logic why, how, where, in what way, what data, why a particular technique of analyzing the data has been used. It involves an important step of developing and formulating a hypothesis to make tentative assumptions in order to draw certain conclusions. Hypothesis helps in keeping the researcher on the right track as it helps to focus on the important aspects of the problem and to determine the data collecting methods. Thus, research is a systematic and critical investigation in the field of knowledge to establish facts or principles. The research scholar makes some generalizations and interpretations, and seeks to explain his findings on the basis of some theory. He takes into consideration both kinds of facts, one that favours and goes along with his hypothesis and the other that goes against his assumptions. Thus, it is very important that:

The researcher must not be prejudiced or subjective in his observation, experiment, analysis or interpretation nor should he be erratic in the arrangement of facts nor ignore the facts that shatter his postulates or hypothesis. (Sinha, p.2)

Research aims to make a fresh approach to a subject, thereby helping in the discovery of new facts, insights and concepts; and their correct and genuine information, after processing, analyzing, interpreting, evaluating and editing of data to improve its quality. Research is not only a fresh interpretation of the known facts but also the revision of accepted laws or theories in the light of the discovery of new facts. Thus, it is a kind of investigation that examines an accepted theory to revise or modify it or sometimes even to reject it. Research can also be in the field of practical application of new or revised conclusions, theories or laws. For example, the modern psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, that of conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious mind, are readily applied in the analysis of a literary piece.

RESEARCH IN LITERATURE

Literary materials are a storehouse of wisdom, an ocean of knowledge, with important moral and didactic values for the development of human society on the virtuous path. As literature is the product of the creative writer who uses his highly observant and imaginative skills in blending reality with fancy, we can not limit literary research in narrow confinement – either to the literary text or to the writer. It has to study both. It will not be proper to separate them. While studying a literary text, we can not ignore its creator nor can we study an author isolating him from his works. Since, literature is a mirror to society, it reflects and expresses man in different situations, his problems, aspirations and various dilemmas. It studies man in all walks of life. Thus, literature has its impact on different branches of knowledge, and in turn, is influenced by them. A creative writer consciously or unconsciously, knowingly or unknowingly, uses all the knowledge he has acquired, in his imaginative work. For instance, Milton made use of religion; Donne used his knowledge of science and mathematics; and Wordsworth made an extensive use of environment and nature in his works. Thus, all branches of knowledge are inter-connected and inter-related. A researcher can not develop a critical and analytical insight unless and until he has a basic and an elementary knowledge of different fields – that of the natural sciences, social sciences, philosophy, history, psychology and religion. The aim of research is to develop the powers of understanding and appreciating literature. Literary research is generally of four kinds – textual, biographical, theoretical and interpretive.

Textual research is concerned with “the establishment of an authoritative text, correction of past editions, chronology, authenticity and attribution” (Sinha, p.3). The text should be a genuine one i.e.

the original text written by the author. As research means going from the known to unknown, it first assimilates the intellectual achievements of the predecessors. The research scholar should have a thorough knowledge of what has been done in the past and what is the present status of knowledge in the field of his investigation. Otherwise, he may repeat the ideas that have already been expressed earlier. Hence, he should survey the matter on the topic he is going to do research. He must study the different points of view critically, and then assimilate logically for full understanding of the problem he is going to investigate. Then he should try to discover new facts and give fresh interpretation of the known facts. What Bacon said in the seventeenth century is still valid for a researcher: "Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider."

Biographical research deals with the life of the author along with the various circumstances and influences that had an impact on him. Though biographical research is neglected and undermined nowadays, it certainly helps in the understanding of an author's mind, his views, notions and his art. The great English poet and critic, T.S. Eliot renounces biographical research since he held the opinion that a work of art expresses emotion or feeling which has its origin in that work itself and it is not to be found in the life of the artist. Another critic, Kenneth Burke stresses that the artist translates his "emotion into a mechanism for arousing emotion in others" (p.69). But this does not appear to be true. D.S. Mishra, rightly advocates his point when he says:

An artist cannot be compared with 'a filament' because he is a living and conscious organism who leaves the marks of his personality on whatever he does or creates. (p.22)

Leslie Fiedler advises the literary critics to connect a writer's work and his biography because he is of the view that "it is impossible to draw a line between the work the poet writes and the work he lives, between the life he lives and the life he writes" (pp.253-273). Literature is basically a social product and so the poet or a writer is also a part and parcel of his society. In spite of all his uniqueness, his individuality, he represents his social group. This social group has its own ideas, views and philosophy. Thus, for a complete understanding of his works, it is necessary to study his contemporary period or age, the socio-political conditions and dominant ideas of his time. For example, if we want to study Shakespeare, we should know the kind of people the Elizabethans were; if we want to study Tennyson, we should know the kind of people Victorians were, their culture, traditions, customs, manners, beliefs, relationships and their way of life. The changes in the socio-political structure along with new discoveries and inventions in the field of Science, are responsible for the emergence of new ideas and concepts. People of the new age do not think in exactly the same way and manner the people of the preceding age. Hence, for the proper evaluation of a writer or his work, it is advisable to know his contemporary period along with the periods that preceded and follows his age. Biographical research shows the growth of author's mind. Thus, all the external events and influences should be studied in relation to the shaping of an author's thought and art. It tells us more about the author's contemporary period – time, place and people. Though, a biographical approach may not be an authentic and reliable tool to evaluate a work of art; but it certainly helps one to understand a literary piece. It brings us closer and familiarizes us with the consciousness of the artist that gave birth to his imaginative creation. It provides the dates of publications that help us in tracing the path of artist's development. It brings forth the information of the artist's social, political and intellectual aspect as well as the environment. It also investigates the artistic process and explores the artist's inner world to trace the sources of his themes. The task of the biographer is not all that easy. He has to collect material from different sources. He has to study the author's works. He has to gather facts from official records, journals, letters, books and people. He has to distinguish fact from fiction and then present the life story, laying more emphasis on the literary side by correlating the important events of his life and time and his works, systematically, chronologically and interestingly.

Theoretical research aims to propound a theory of literature or modify and improve an already existing one. Earlier, the scholars and philosophers often repeated the classical theory of literature as propounded by Aristotle and Longinus. But in the twentieth century, advances in psychology, anthropology, sociology and linguistics made people to look at literature from varied angles. Many

modern critics have used different approach methods and techniques to analyse literary texts and evaluate creative writers on the basis of the theories they have formulated after deep and vast study. Hence, now we have different branches of criticism, namely, New Criticism, Psycho-analytical Criticism, Marxist Criticism, Formalist Criticism, Genre Criticism, Archetypal Criticism, Historical Criticism, Interdisciplinary Criticism, Modernism, Post-modernism, Post-colonialism, Structuralism and Deconstruction, which are all systematic and distinct from each other.

Interpretive research uses the application of the principles of a particular theory in order to understand, analyse, interpret and evaluate a literary text or an author. It may be “a study of an author’s style, use of imagery or symbolism, exploration of myth, perception of social reality, expression of the inner soul, development of thought or the structure of his texts” (Sinha, p.4). In this era of computers and digital age, the world of research is ever-expanding as new technologies keep evolving, new techniques for obtaining data are becoming readily available, and more secondary sources are becoming easily available to the public.

RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Teaching and research are the main components of our higher education system. Teaching is “handing down the torch of knowledge to the next generation” (Sinha, p.5). Generally, it is through formal education and teaching in institutions that the younger generation gets an opportunity to access and acquire the treasure of knowledge it ancestors and fore-fathers have collected. Research adds something new to this already existing treasure. The new knowledge acquired by research helps in the advancement of knowledge and thus in the progress of our civilization. A sincere teacher is always ready to learn something new, to add to his store of knowledge. He does not mind changing, assimilating and modifying his views and notions in the light of new facts and theories, and is always eager to share, to transfer, to acquaint the learners with the new knowledge he has gained. His curiosity to know more keeps on increasing. Instead of repeating the same old things of the syllabus in the classroom year after year, he looks for providing something new, something different and something interesting to his students.

CONCLUSION

Thus, advancement of knowledge is the main objective of literary research. Literary research helps in broadening the mind and sharpening the critical and analytical insight of the research scholar. While an average reader reads literary works for the purpose of seeking joy, entertainment, moral values and teachings; a researcher is bothered more about the artistic presentation of reality. He gathers, observes and assimilates the facts stated there and analyse the author’s point of view and compare them with his own opinion. For this, a critical insight is a necessity, which can be developed by wide reading and participation in literary discussions. Research involves both, teachers as well as researchers, where they dedicate their life in discovering truth in order to play their valuable role in contribution to knowledge, advancement of knowledge and for the benefit of mankind. They help in the enrichment of culture, to better understanding of man’s feelings, emotions and problems through literature. Thus, education along with meaningful research has the power to shape and reform the society.

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