

From Yore To The Present: A Critical Study On The Trends And Movements In American Literature

Abhinav S

Integrated MA ENGLISH
Amrita vishwa vidyapeetham
Amritapuri campus
Kollam District
Kerala
abhinavanu1234@gmail.com

ABSTRACT :

American literature or the literature of America , from the beginning to the present has underwent several changes. When it travelled from the oral form to the written one, it witnessed a drastic change in all aspects. In the initial days of creation, authors imitated the British models and the literature hence was not original in its form and content. In later years, writers focused much on their land and its culture and thus the American literature in its original form started sprouting and flourishing. American literature in its present form is innovative and experimental in several aspect especially in themes, structure, form, content, narration etc. Since all the forms and models are available in American literature, every curriculum prefers this as part of their syllabus. The paper entitled “From Yore to the Present: A Critical Study on the Trends and Movements in American Literature” is to show how American Literature has underwent changes in the course of time and how teachers approach this subject. The paper also covers the new teaching trends and the barriers teachers face to convey the subject effectively to the students. The research paper also attempts a comparative study of American literature and British literature and the acceptance and sustainability of American Literature over the English Literature. The paper discusses the modern and innovative techniques used by the great writers in American and English Literatures.

Key words: Trends and movements, American literature, British Literature, Curriculum , innovative techniques, culture.

INTRODUCTION

The American literature has undergone changes in the teaching of American literature ,How does the present teachers face the trends,The time-limits that they face to complete, etc. are depicted in this article .The article also depicts the views on critical insights to the American literature. The reference to the work of famous American historians and authors are depicted in the paper. It mainly emphasizes on the work “Main Currents In The American thoughts ‘ this work has won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1928 is more emphasized in the work this was one of the most influential books of American historians of those times it depicts the sustainability of American literature the article also depicts the condition, acceptability and the sustainability of American literature in English literature .It talks about the famous writers of American literature and how that emergence made American literature to pave the way of it toward becoming the dominated literature over other literature of English language this article can be considered as the depiction of a war between the other literatures and American literature. The article shows an emergence of American literature as a victorious warrior from the battle field.

TRENDS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND HOW DOES IT GET FACED BY THE PEOPLE

Certain trends in the learning and teaching of literature are same, regardless of the branch of the literature. English and American literature stand equally strong in the fight of domination over each other the critical revolution of 1930s and 40s paved the shifting path of literature from the historical approach to the critical approach . Of course, it is the duty of a teacher to do justice to his subject but the teachers of literature are forced to talk about a work, even if it is a work which doesn't have much value of being discussed or much content to be discussed in a detailed manner in the class the teachers are forced to stick to the course book they are prescribed of. They are deprived from being more innovative in the subject, as they do not have enough time to cover the portions .The teacher can no longer go through the work bypassing all the topics and all the points discussed in the work as he is unarmed with time. He is in short of time and in the run to complete the portions that he is assigned to complete within a stipulated time period. This makes him unable to go through the work in a historical analysis of word by word. This forces him to have an analysis in a critically analyzed way. This is the change of his analytical direction from historical to critical analysis .

The critical approach dominates the English literature and American literature as per my views because in the world of today's timeless generation, we have no time to waste on deep analyzing of anything we are behind the fastest and precise analysis, so that we can get the precise result in a short time period. I personally find it quite refreshing, I am also a member of this fast running generation of timelessness and I am, as everyone are in the track of sprint to the completion of targets given to me by the authorities of mine. As a person from English base, I find it very refreshing to find that American literature is taught as a main subject in English departments, and given equal importance as the English literature. This is due to the emergence of new critical insights . So as the new critical insight arrived in common use of English scholars and students ,American literature also got an important role in English literature .

But the teachers of American literature are following the same doctrines of their English colleagues the American literature is more closely tied up with historical and cultural events and matters regarding more importance on past writers and the old works. It was once believed that the study of American literature writers had to appeal the historical importance being a student of English literature. I strongly support the above mentioned point that American literature is associated with the history of English literature

In the book "main currents of American literature" ,he gave a study of American literature in the time period of 1927–1930 . The book had a great influence on the American literature that made it next to impossible to use the term "belles letters" except to express distress or disappointment in an American context .No assessments of the present trends can be made without determining the Parrington's present status in teaching of American literature.

The critical approach of a work is concerned about the intrinsic qualities of the work, more than the social importance. For the American studies, it is likely to consider a work as a

social document .There always arise a question if the American literature is to be studied in literature or it should be studied in American minds .This makes the teacher to face a danger of split personality. Shall he please the Parringtonians or the English literary people!?

The teacher of American literature should firstly be a lover of literature, like other teachers who teaches literature .they must have a feeling for literature they must have a sense of self in literature. i.e., they must take literature as their life because it is what makes those people to live it must be their oxygen to live .They must be devoted to the literature they have to be surrendered to the literature.

Certain American writers have won marked eminence in the English curriculum .if alist of four authors, Hawthorne, Melville, James and Faulkner is given to the teachers , most of them would select all of them gladly as the greatest writers of literature towering above all the other writers like peak above the foothills .there is an amazing trend of publications going on in the American literature field . in the PMLA annual bibliography,(1955)the American literature section fills over 30 pages and English literature filled 35 pages. This shows an improvement in the ratio of publications from 27:35in 1954 to 30:35 in 1955.almost half of the publication efforts are visible to the American field's fraternity.It seems that a large number of modern writers are emerging in the American literature .Rendell Stewart in his article on "Modern Trends Of Teaching American literature "depicts the numerical comparison of number of titles won by American writers,in 1955 with their number of publications in 1954 in brackets.

Shakespeare : 135 (106)

Whitman :53 (23)

Milton :43 (54)

Hawthorne :39 (20)

Chaucer :33 (44)

Pound :33 (10)

Melville :32(15)

Faulkner :30(44)

Emerson :29(10)

Hemmingway :28(8)

Dickens :26 (13)

Elliot :25 (24)

Wordsworth :18 (12)

Keats :17 (20)

Just as other national literatures of several countries have, American literature was formed by the history of the country that produced it. For almost a century and a half, America was merely a group of colonies from which a few hardy souls gradually moved westward. American poetry, drama, fiction and social literary criticism from the early 17th century through the turn of the 21st century marked its own images in the mind of American people. The contributions of African Americans to American literature formed a type of literature called African American literature. The major figures of American literature are : Emily Dickinson ,Tom Lea, Quentin Reynolds, Shelby Steele ,Mark Twain, T.S. Elliot, Herman Melville etc.

In the beginning stage ,American literature was a colonial literature, by authors who were Englishmen. John Smith, a soldier of fortune, is the initiator of American literature. His chief books included “A True Relation of Virginia”(1608) and” The Generall Historie of Virginia”,“New England, and the Summer Isles”(1624). Although these volumes often glorified their author, they were written to explain colonizing opportunities to Englishmen. But other writers argued questions of government involving the relationship between church and state. Most authors attacked the jauntily set forth by Nathaniel Ward of Massachusetts Bay in The Simple Cobar of Aggawam in America (1647). John Winthrop’s Journal, (written in 1630–49) says sympathetically of the attempt of Massachusetts Bay Colony to form a theocracy, a state with God at its head and with its laws based upon the Bible. The utilitarian writings of the 17th century American literature included biographies, treaties, accounts of voyages, and sermons. There were few achievements in drama or fiction, since there was a widespread prejudice against these forms. Bad but popular poetry appeared in the Bay Psalm Book of 1640 and in Michael Wigglesworth’s summary in doggerel verse of Calvinistic belief, The Day of Doom (1662).had some poetry of a higher order. Anne Bradstreet of Massachusetts wrote some lyrics published in The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America (1650), which conveyed her feelings concerning religion and her family. Edward Taylor, an English-born minister and physician who lived in Boston and Westfield, Massachusetts. Taylor wrote lyrics that showed his delight in Christian belief and experience. He is Ranked still higher by modern critics is a poet whose works were not discovered and published until 1939.Both the content and form of the literature of this first century in America were hence marked in English.

American literature is divided into five major periods:

The Colonial and Early National period(17th century to 1830)

The Romantic period(1830 to 1870)

Realism and Naturalism(1870 to 1910)

The Modernist period(1910 to 1945)

The Contemporary period(1945 to present)

The colonial and early national period was the period in which the American literature that consisted of practical non -fictions written by British settlers who lived in the colonies that later formed the United States of America. By the first decades of the 19th century, a truly American literature began to emerge. Though still derived from British literary tradition, the short stories and novels published from 1800 through the 1820s began to depict American society and explore the American landscape. The Romantic Period (1830 to 1870)paved a way of thinking that values the individual over the group, the subjective over the objective, and replacing science with emotions. It also values the wildness of nature over human-made

order . American writers embraced it in the early 19th century. Realism and Naturalism (1870 to 1910) brought in writers like Samuel Clemens, Theodor Dreiser etc. The modernist period marks the emergence of delusions and a sense of loss in American fictions that emerged the authors like Earnest Hemmingway, Willa Cather, William Faulkner .The Contemporary Period (1945 to present) made the American novel took on an enormous number of forms after World War II. Realist, meta-fictional, postmodern, absurdist, autobiographical, short, long, feminist, stream of consciousness these and dozens more labels can be applied to the vast output of American novelists. Notable dramatists include David MametDavid Mamet, AmiriBaraka, Sam Shepard, August Wilson.

CONCLUSION

As a whole, the American literature is a historically and socially revolutionized result of a lot of controversies and social questioning of the inequalities. As time went on, the American literature also underwent changes in its structure, form, theme, style, tone and in its every form. the five periods , in which the American literature is consisting of all the ideologies of time from the historical or the colonized literature ,travelling through the phase of revolutionary changes like romanticism , realism , naturalism , modernism , and the contemporary literature which continues its phase even today .This literature moulded the legendary writers like Elliot, Emily Dickinson , Faulkner, Shakespeare, Emerson , John Milton the list will be endless if I am mentioning all the legendary writers. The American literature started with catholic writers, but the emergence of revolutionary thoughts and romanticism framed it to be a revolutionized literature. As the articles opens with the problems that the teachers comes across in their career, While teaching American literature, the teachers come across the issues with time management, the confusion to choose which type of analyzing they have to choose to teach –critical or historical and the acceptance of American literature among the students .

REFERENCES

- 1) *American Renaissance (1941)*
- 2) *“Collage Of English” (national council of teachers of English) vol:18*
- 3) *“Main currents of American thoughts” (Vernon Parrington)*
- 4) *Randell Stewart’s “Modern Trends Of American Literature”(1954)*