

Write a critical note on Johnson's theory of poetry and also the nature and function of poetry.

Introduction :-

Whenever we study the lives of the poet we form an obvious idea of Johnson's broad view of poetry, and its nature and function. He is a very severe and stringent neo-classicist, his natural common sense makes him rise above his literary prejudices. A famous critic Robert Bridges says, "Johnson lacked poetic sensibility and was incapable of poetic appreciation". Another popular critic Christopher Hollis says, "For poetry in the strict sense of the word he cared nothing. The window of beauty was a window through which he could never look". In this way we find that his theory of poetry reveals romantic tendencies.

Nature of Poetry :-

In his 'Life of Milton', Johnson defines poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason". In the life of Waller, he narrates, "The essence of poetry is inventing, such invention by producing something unexpected surprises and delights. Imagination is the faculty which strongly impresses on the writer's mind and enables him to convey to the readers the various forms of nature, incidents of life and energies of passion thus, the poet becomes a creator by virtue of his inventive and imagination power of Milton's comes he writes, this work more truly poetical can rarely be found". About his judgement he further remarks, "Allusions, images and descriptive

epithets embellish almost every period with lavish decoration".

Function of poetry :-

poetry must give pleasure, but it must also have truth. In other words it must serve the purposes of life. He quotes the view of Baku, the poet first work is to find a moral which his story is afterwards to illustrate and establish". He has all praises for Milton's Paradise Lost, for it essentially a moral poem. In other words, the poet must store his mind with inexhaustible variety and uses his vast knowledge for the enforcement or decoration of moral and religious truth. In this way, he had a very exalted conception of the calling of a poet and the function of poetry. It may be mentioned in this regard that he realized the epic as the highest kind of poetry.

Realism in poetry and life :-

It is perceived that the Dr. wanted to wed poetry to life. As Raleigh points out, "to get of the affections, conventions and extravagances in literature, to make it speak to the heart on themes of universal human interest, to wed poetry with life". Thus he was a great critic of poetry. He was very hostile to classical mythology. He severely criticises Waller for borrowing his sentiments and illustrations from the old mythology. The men of the Renaissance had been inspired by the beauty of classical myths.

Johnson attacked the pastoral conversion of poetry which appeared to him to be artistic, unrealistic and meaningless. Raleigh says, "The famous criticism Lycidas was not primarily dictated by personal or political hostility to Milton. The substance of it is repeated in several passages of the lives". We may not agree with Johnson, but the soundness of this judgement, and his instinct for reality can not be questioned. He found Lycidas lacking in the deep personal affection and regret.

Dislike of Blank Verse And Defence of Rhyme:-

His passion for sincerity and reality displays his dislike for blank verse. It was his belief that poetry should express natural sentiments in a language, dignified, indeed, but not too remote from the speech of daily life. He further regards prose as a natural medium of expression for man. He thought rhyme to be essential for poetry. In his life of Milton, he points out, "Poetry may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please, nor can rhyme ever be safely spared, but where the subject is well able to support itself". It is his view that blank verse is to be avoided, for it may betray feeble minds into all sorts of excess.

His Liberal Classicism:-

According to Raleigh, "More than those who came immediately before him, Johnson stands for the classical doctrine in language and literature". It is true that he belonged to

the Classical School, and much of his criticism of poetry is distorted by his classical and personal prejudices. Undoubtedly he judge by rules. but he derived his principles of judgement not from books, like his predecessors, but from reason, from his experience of life. In his appreciation of shakespeare. Mingling of the tragic and the comic, and his violation of the unities, He ceases to be a classic and goes over to the other camp. It discloses that he was capable of highest poetic sensibility. poetry is not all intuition and imagination. It is also a Craft, and the excesses of the romantics have shown that he was right in emphasising the verbal skill of poets like pope.

Conclusion :-

It is quite early in his literary career that johnson began to take interest in shakespeare. In 1745, he published Observation on the tragedy of Macbeth. Paradise lost appears to be the greatest epic of John milton. His preface has been warmly praised. Augustine Birrell writes, "Nobody else has ever written about shakespeare one half so entertainingly."