

Aristotle's theory of imitation (BA Part 3 Eng hons)

The word imitation is derived from the Greek word mimesis. Aristotle has discussed several catchwords like mimesis, hamertia and catharsis in his epoch-making book Poetics to substantiate his views. These catch words became so popular that they have been repeatedly used by critics to discuss the theory of criticism supplied by Aristotle.

Aristotle has contributed immensely to the repertory of criticism He has successfully cultivated his critical output in his seminal work Poetics .He has elaborately discussed several critical issues which give a clear insight of his scholarship. His theory of imitation is the outcome of Plato's remarks on art .Plato in his monumental work Republic has insisted that art is an imitation of nature. Expressing solidarity with Plato Aristotle gave the same definition saying that art is an imitation of nature with a difference.

Actually Plato was an idealist philosopher .He was of the opinion that God is the supreme idea. All worldly objects are the reflections of the original idea preserved in the hands of God. In this way he insisted that art is thrice removed from reality. It is an imitation of an imitation. Plato has given the example of a table to substantiate his standpoint. He stated that the concept of table firstly emerges in the mind of the carpenter which in turn is the reflection of the idea of table preserved with the God In this way the table which appears before us is not the original construction but thrice removed from reality. This principle is applicable for all forms of art. Plato has included five objects within the periphery of art which are- Architecture, sculpture, Painting, Music and poetry. In this way Plato considers poetry thrice removed from reality. Since the poets do not create anything original therefore they should be thrown out from the

Utopia or an ideal society. The poets lure people by virtue of their imaginative faculty. They do not contribute anything substantial for the betterment of society. Actually Plato was an ardent admirer of the poetry of great Greek poets Homer and Hesiod. Despite his close affinity with these poets he refused to give a go ahead to poets in an ideal society .Plato also insisted that in the poetry of Homer gods have been depicted as ordinary fellows and are indulged in making all sorts of mistakes human beings are subject to . It will give a wrong message to the masses .In this way Plato gave a severe blow to poetry which was revived by his staunch supporter Aristotle.

At this critical juncture Aristotle came to the rescue of poetry and revived its lost glory. After the manner of Plato, Aristotle also defined poetry or art as an imitation of nature. But there is a wide difference in the interpretation of Aristotle's definition of poetry. He clearly stated that art is not a mere imitation of nature. The poet does not indulge in imitation while writing or composing his work. He is blessed with an enriched imaginative faculty which helps him create something new. Thus instead of imitating nature the poet gives an added charm and beauty to it which helps it acquire a distinct look. In this way a new composition emerges .Besides this the weaknesses and shortcomings in the original composition are also removed. Thus the poet or artist no longer remains an imitator but he is elevated to status of a creator and should be accorded a respectable position in society which Plato has earlier rejected. The poet does not use his imaginative faculty to entrap people as Plato had hinted at. He is indulged in creation using his imaginative faculty. Thus imagination is a boon and not a curse. Later in the 19th century eminent poet and critic Coleridge has expressed solidarity with Aristotle's view in his critical book *Literaria Biographia*. In a chapter of the book entitled fancy an imagination Coleridge has divided imagination into primary

imagination and secondary imagination and has stated that those blessed with secondary imagination are capable of writing poetry. In Indian Poetics too poets are treated as creator and are treated next to Lord Brahma. As Lord Brahma is indulged in the creation of the entire cosmos in the same manner the poet takes part in poetic creation actively which is also endorsed by the renowned modern critic T. S. Eliot in his theory of impersonality.