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Sub :- Sem-2 (CC-7, Unit-2) M.A

Topic :- On the Sublime : Longinus .

Q. What according to Longinus is the criterion of excellence in a great work of literature?

Ans) According to Longinus, Sublimity is an eminence and excellence in language. It carries the reader out of himself. This Sublimity appears in a timely, vigorous expression which induces in the reader or listener a mood like that of a trance. In this mood the reader loses his own identity and he is swayed by an irresistible power. Such a sublime expression illuminates the subject chosen for discussion or presentation.

Merely good and noble emotions or passions do not create sublimity. If the great passions are not properly regulated, there will be chaos. They have to be curbed and regulated properly. Similarly genius gets spoilt if it is not well-controlled by art. It is through art that we can arrive at a proper evaluation of genius. Hence there is an art that can teach us the Sublime. This teaching is necessary because genius is



normally open to risks and dangers which lead it to the opposite of the Sublime. Such dangers are four in number. The first one is turgidity which appears as bombastic expressions. The second one is puerility, childishness arising from a straining after the artificial. The third one is called Parenthesis or the expression of a passion or a sentiment inappropriate to the context of the situation. The last one is frigidity which appears when the author struggles to say something new or to say something in a new way. All these presuppose a misdirected craze. Longinus seeks to tell us how we can avoid them. They can be avoided if we have a clear knowledge of what the Sublime is itself is.

Hence the Sublime is related to the grasp of language. For it needed proper handling of figures: noble phrasology, choice of suitable words and their proper arrangement and dignified composition having a proper length.

Low and undignified vocabulary also tends to disfigure sublimity. Ill-sounding words and vulgar idioms should be avoided. The choice of proper and striking words is essential for producing the Sublime effect, because it is through words that a man expresses himself. Beautiful words are the very soul of lofty thought. But inappropriate magnificence of diction should be avoided.



For example, trifling subjects should not be treated in grand manner.

Figurative language possesses great natural power, and so the use of metaphor contributes to the Sublime. Metaphors should however be used in impassioned and descriptive passages. "The proper time for using metaphor is when the passions roll like a torrent and sweep a multitude of them down their restless flood."

Hence Longinus suggests to recapture, "Something of that vital creative force which had gone to the making of the earlier masterpieces; and its effect he describes as that of illumination, guiding the mind in some mysterious way to the lofty stand of the ideal."

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