Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science (RIELS) Journal
Vol. 7, No. 4, September 2026| Page 268-274 |
https://www.randwickresearch.com/index.php/rielsj

Literary Criticism and Political Ideology

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v7i3.1340

| Nasratullah Nasrat[1] | Gul Rahman Rahmani[2] |

[1,2] Parwan University, Afghanistan

[1]nnasratullah12@gmail.com
[2]g.rahman_rahmani@yahoo.com

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

ABSTRACT

Literature serves as a mirror of social and intellectual processes and transformations. In examining the relationship between literary criticism and political ideology, it is essential to move beyond general forms of critique and analysis toward specialized approaches to literary criticism. Literary works may embody multiple theoretical perspectives, making it challenging for critics to identify and explain the various theories underlying a particular work. Similarly, authors may not adhere exclusively to a single ideology, as their ideological perspectives may be reflected, consciously or unconsciously, in their literary works. This article explores the dimensions of political ideology in literature, with particular attention to major literary schools and their political dimensions. It also examines the nature of ideology in literature and considers how ideological elements can influence the language and meaning of literary works. In this context, ideology can contribute to the artistic expression and interpretation of literary messages.

KEYWORDS

Literature; literary criticism; political ideology; society and governance; language.

INTRODUCTION

Literary criticism and literary theory are interconnected concepts that have been widely debated in the field of literature. Their relationship with politics and ideology introduces additional complexity because political theories and ideological perspectives may influence and be reflected in literary works. Literature represents a realm of emotion and artistic expression, whereas politics often addresses the concrete realities of social life. Historically, literature and politics have maintained a close relationship, influencing one another across different periods. In some cases, political developments have influenced literary movements, while literary works have also contributed to political and social discourse. At times, political agendas have overshadowed literature and its authors.

Literary works often reflect the sociopolitical contexts of the societies in which they are produced, and many authors address political and social issues either directly or indirectly. A significant number of prominent literary works have also engaged critically with political ideologies. In discussions of literary theory, the works of Marxist writers and authors concerned with minority rights provide examples of literature's engagement with political and social questions. Furthermore, several prominent political figures throughout history have produced significant literary works, further demonstrating the relationship between literature and politics. In such works, language, social power, and ideology are often explored while simultaneously reflecting political and literary symbols.

Thus, the relationship between literature and politics may at times be antagonistic or adversarial, while at other times it may be characterized by mutual influence. Political ideas and ideologies may naturally find expression in literature, but literary works can also

challenge political ideas and established systems. The political climate, restrictions, and general political atmosphere of a society can influence literary themes and forms. Authors may also face censorship and other limitations. In societies undergoing revolutionary periods and political transformations, some literary figures have played important roles in shaping public attitudes toward political values and social change.

Importance and Urgency of the Research

In Afghanistan, numerous authors and literary figures occupy significant positions in the fields of literature and art. However, the political ideologies of some authors have influenced their literary works, leading readers to consider their political positions alongside the literary merits of their works. Examining the relationship between political ideology and literary criticism is therefore important for understanding how political perspectives influence both the production and interpretation of literature.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the interaction between literary value and political ideology in literary works.
2. To examine how political ideology influences the interpretation and evaluation of literary works.
3. To identify the relationship between major literary theories or schools and the political ideas associated with them.

Research Questions

1. How are political ideologies reflected in literary works?
2. To what extent does a critic's perspective influence the interpretation of literary works?
3. How can readers identify political and ideological elements in literary texts?

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study employs a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were obtained from selected books and scholarly sources addressing literary criticism, ideology, political literature, and literary theory. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. The study analyzes these sources thematically, focusing on the ways political ideology intersects with literary interpretation, literary movements, and the evaluation of literary works.

In its traditional definition, literary criticism refers to the practice of distinguishing between genuine and inauthentic works and has often been described as the art of identifying literary value, quality, and authenticity. Over time, however, its scope has expanded beyond simple categorization. Literary criticism has developed into several approaches based on the relationship among the text, the reader, and the author. Traditional approaches have predominantly focused on the text itself, whereas other approaches have emphasized the reader or audience. These developments have gradually expanded literary criticism into a distinct field within literary theory. Another important dimension is political ideology, which is expressed through human thought and social action.

In the West, discussions of the relationship between literature and political ideology include the theories and writings associated with literary critic Matthew Arnold. In his works and analyses, Arnold's writings examine the relationship between literature, culture, and social thought. Political and social ideas can influence literary production, making ideology an important factor in the interpretation of literary expression. The truth or

falsehood of the belief that dark-skinned individuals are inferior to lighter-skinned individuals is less important here than the effects that such beliefs have on social reality (Arnold, 1993).

Throughout history, many literary movements have emerged during periods of social and economic transformation in Europe. The emergence and decline of literary movements and ideologies have often coincided with changes in political and social circumstances. The translation and circulation of literary works have also contributed to the transmission of political and intellectual ideas across societies. As a result, new literary works and movements have emerged that were influenced, directly or indirectly, by these theories, works, and political ideologies.

Arnold's views were shaped by his particular intellectual and cultural position, and he advocated a rational and cultural perspective rather than a purely ideological one. Some critics, however, have criticized Arnold for giving greater importance to religious ideology than to political ideology, arguing that he sought to promote religious beliefs through concepts such as tolerance and forgiveness. The works *Literature and Belief* and *God and the Gospel* contain Christian themes expressed through literary and poetic experiences. Arnold also argued that even the ideology associated with the middle class must find appropriate expression in literary form (Eagleton, 1402).

Critics often examine political influence in considerable depth. According to Iranian scholar Dr. Ali Asghar Hadad, a review of literary history demonstrates that literature has frequently emerged as a catalyst for political and social movements. Literary works have introduced significant social and political issues, contributed to the formation of public opinion, and helped create conditions for social transformation. Thus, literature has not merely reflected social and political issues; in many cases, it has also functioned as a means of raising awareness and promoting social change through artistic expression (Matlabzadeh, 1396).

In text-centered criticism, the text is viewed as an autonomous and active entity that originates from the author, possesses meaning, and establishes relationships with other texts and cultures through intertextual relationships. Formalism and New Criticism are particularly associated with text-centered approaches, although Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, historical, and other approaches also employ textual analysis alongside social, historical, cultural, or ideological perspectives.

The shifting structure of values that forms the foundation of prevailing views is part of what we call ideology. Generally, ideology refers to the ways in which our thoughts and beliefs are connected to dominant structures and power relations within the society in which we live. From this broad definition, it can be understood that not all foundational beliefs necessarily possess an ideological character. One aspect of human nature is the tendency to perceive ourselves as moving toward the future. Although this perspective may be closely connected to prevailing power structures within a society, such a relationship does not necessarily exist in every context. Some societies, for example, may advocate a return to the past as a means of reaching the future (Eagleton, 1402).

In discussing the history of Pashto literature, the contemporary era of Pashto literature emerged more than a century ago, coinciding with Afghanistan's independence. Its initial reflections appeared in publications such as *Siraj-al-Akhbar*, *Afghan Jirga*, and others. These works were influenced by political and nationalist ideas associated with independence and resistance to British colonialism, which also shaped approaches to literary evaluation. Consequently, a significant wave of national awakening emerged, reflecting the influence of political ideology on literature. This influence can be understood as a form of political transformation in literature.

Western literary critic Terry Eagleton, in his work *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, argues that the relationship between literature and ideology involves not only dominant unconscious beliefs deeply rooted in people's minds but also the ways in which feelings, values, and beliefs are connected to the persistence of social power. The recognition that such beliefs cannot simply be regarded as personal preferences is illustrated through a literary case study (Eagleton, 1402).

In his landmark practical-criticism experiments, I. A. Richards presented poems to Cambridge students without identifying their authors or dates of composition. He used the students' responses to examine the factors that shaped literary judgment. He removed the titles of the poems and the names of their poets and presented them to undergraduate students for evaluation. The students' evaluations varied considerably, with some well-known poets being undervalued while lesser-known poets received greater appreciation. A noteworthy aspect of this experiment, which Richards himself overlooked, was the underlying similarity in the students' unconscious value judgments that may have contributed to their differing interpretations (Richards, 1997).

When examining Richards' students' evaluations of literary works, one is struck by similarities in their responses and reading habits. What expectations do they bring to literature? Under what assumptions do they read a poem? How do they expect the text of a poem to conform to their expectations? These observations are not particularly surprising, as the participating students were predominantly young and white and were largely associated with elite or upper-middle-class educational backgrounds. Moreover, they lived at a time when Europe was experiencing significant political transformations, which influenced the perspectives of both authors and readers on literary texts.

Albert Camus, a critic and philosopher, argues that literature is closely related to politics; however, this does not mean that literature should necessarily be ideological. Rather, literature should seek truth rather than promote a particular ideology. In contrast, Iranian literary critic Dr. Siawash Kasraei asserts that ruling authorities sometimes impose restrictions and censorship on literary works in order to manipulate and control literature for political purposes, thereby undermining freedom, creativity, and freedom of expression. Conversely, other scholars argue that authors and artists sometimes produce works that challenge prevailing political practices, transforming literature into a platform for resistance against political systems (as cited in Rahmani, 1399).

The development of new literary theory represents an attempt to move beyond such realities toward a wide range of possible interpretations and approaches. These approaches encompass themes such as organic coherence, innate truths, imagination, the human psyche, myth, language, and other phenomena. To some extent, this movement away from historical realities can be understood as a reaction against the deterministic view of history that was prevalent in the nineteenth century. Critics of this approach have sometimes questioned its apparent departure from social and historical realities.

Literary criticism operates within theoretical frameworks that may encompass social, philosophical, historical, or literary perspectives. Notable approaches include Formalism, Feminism, Structuralism, Marxism, Postcolonialism, and Historical Criticism, among others. These approaches can also be examined through three fundamental components: the speaker, the language, and the listener. This model can likewise be applied to the process of literary creation.

The central premise here is that an individual thinker observes a text and seeks to gain insight into experiences, truths, realities, history, or tradition. Various factors contribute to this individual's interpersonal relationships, while readers are more than mere spectators of

the creator's insights. An important question, therefore, concerns how individual cognition is manifested through the various forms of understanding available to readers.

When one moves away from the richness of individual life, which literature exemplifies, one may encounter a distant and mechanical form of existence. Philosophical positions, like those expressed in literature, often reveal divergences that reflect the characteristics of an individualistic society while also expressing dissatisfaction with such perspectives. This standpoint can be understood as a reflection of political systems that simplify social interactions and reduce them to individual and isolated pursuits.

By the end of the twentieth century, the interpretation of literature had increasingly shifted toward the creator, with the writer's thoughts, experiences, and social contexts influencing the interpretation of literary texts. Romantic writers, in opposition to Classicism, believed that good poetry emerged from the poet's emotional and imaginative experience. Consequently, understanding the poet's experiences and thoughts became an important aspect of interpreting literary creation (Shakili, 1402)

In Western society during the 1980s, conceptions of human existence became increasingly connected to the prevailing political climate. This development contributed to the emergence of Liberal Humanism as a moral and intellectual perspective emphasizing individual relationships and personal freedom. Within this framework, literature was often regarded as a means of addressing political and social concerns, including freedom, democracy, and individual rights.

Literature produced during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan witnessed an increase in communist thought and anti-imperialist ideas. Such literature promoted revolutionary concepts and often constructed a dichotomy between wealthy or feudal classes and the oppressed. Critics of the period primarily interpreted these works as representations of national values and revolutionary thought. Nevertheless, some critics challenged the idea that literary criticism could be reduced entirely to political interpretation, arguing that such approaches could turn political engagement in literature into a form of ideological mythology. The distinction between political and nonpolitical criticism may be compared to the distinction between a king and a prime minister: although the king may ostensibly refrain from direct political intervention, the prime minister openly engages in political affairs. In such matters, intellectual honesty remains essential.

Another intriguing aspect is that the intellectual development of Pashto literature in Pakistan, particularly in Quetta, does not precisely mirror this trajectory. Analysts argue that the political circumstances and social needs of Pashtun areas differ from, and sometimes conflict with, those found elsewhere. Political conditions strongly influence the literary environment and its development, generating particular discourses that, in turn, create new social and intellectual needs. Here, the concept of *discourse* refers to the prevailing intellectual climate of a particular region. The discourses of a given environment influence the ways in which its inhabitants perceive and interpret issues, distinguishing between matters considered significant and those regarded as insignificant. The concept of discourse has acquired considerable importance throughout history because of its relationship to social power and societal needs. In recent years, social and political discourses, particularly their forms and functions in shaping social conditions, have received increasing attention (Samoon, 1403).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that political ideology has a significant and complex relationship with literary criticism and interpretation. The analysis shows that literary works are influenced by the political, social, historical, and cultural conditions in which

they are produced and received. Literary criticism has also developed beyond traditional text-centered approaches to include the roles of the author, reader, society, history, and ideology.The study further found that readers' social and cultural backgrounds can be influenced by their understanding and evaluation of literary works. Different readers may interpret the same text differently because of their educational experiences, social positions, cultural values, and unconscious assumptions. Therefore, literary interpretation cannot always be considered completely objective or independent of ideology.

Another important finding is that literature can both reflect political realities and contribute to social and political change. In the context of Pashto literature, political and historical developments such as national awakening, resistance to colonialism, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and political developments in Pashtun regions significantly influenced literary themes and criticism. Literature consequently became a means of expressing national identity, resistance, political consciousness, and social concerns. Finally, the results indicate that political ideology is an important factor in literary criticism, but it should not be considered the only basis for interpreting literary works. A balanced approach should consider textual, aesthetic, historical, cultural, social, and political dimensions together.

CONCLUSION

In summary, politics and political ideology remain significant subjects in Pashto literature, particularly from the perspectives of reader-centered and text-centered criticism. Their influence on literary works varies according to social and historical circumstances. Readers may examine the political views and activities of authors and critics alongside the literary content and qualities of their works. The influence of emerging literary theories and movements from the West is also evident in the contemporary literary environment of Pashto.

The relationship between authors and political actors also plays an important role in this context. Globally, authors have engaged with political ideas and social issues in various ways, and some have participated in broader discussions concerning policies and laws. Furthermore, the dissemination and recognition of literary works through the media can contribute to public discussion of political issues. Some literary works have also contributed to political and social movements by expressing ideological positions and addressing social concerns.

Overall, the artistic dimensions of literature can contribute to public discussion of social and political issues by questioning established ideas, expressing social concerns, and stimulating public discussion. Through their literary insights and engagement with social realities, authors can draw attention to broader societal concerns and political issues.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Critics should ground their literary analyses in specific literary theories rather than relying primarily on general perspectives when conducting literary criticism.
2. When political ideology is presented in literary works, critics should prioritize the evaluation of literary content, language, aesthetic qualities, and other literary elements. Political ideology should not overshadow these critical dimensions, as political ideas can also be expressed through other forms and platforms.

REFERENCES

Arnold, M. (1993). *Literature and Thought*. Translated by Ali Rezayan. Tehran: Hamgam Publishing.

Eagleton, T. (1402). *An Overview of Literary Theory*. Translated by Gul Rahman Rahmani. Kabul: Ministry of Higher Education.

Matlabzadeh, N. (1396). *Political Approaches in Literary Criticism*. Tehran: Tisa Publishing.

Rahmani, G. R. (1399). *Beyond the Window*. Kabul: Samoon Publishing Society.

Richards, I. A. (1997). *Practical Criticism*. Translated by Ali Asghari. Tehran: Hamgam Publishing.

Samoon, M. M. (1403). *Discourse Analysis*. Kabul: Samoon Publishing Society.

Shakili, A. (1402). *Art and Unfamiliarity*. Kabul: Samoon Publishing Society.