SPEECHES AS A LITERARY GENRE: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a pioneering study of the speeches to establish that they are also the form of literature. In this paper qualities of the speeches will be traced and analysed. Speeches have a long tradition right from the ancient period down to the present one. The skill in speaking was an important aspect of the curriculum in the ancient period. In this study my chief concern is to prove speeches or oratory as a form of literature. The oratory, the rationale and practice of persuasive public speaking, it is immediate in its orator- audience relationship and reactions. The orator may become the voice of political or social history. Rhetoric or the art of oratory is the art of using words effectively. Oratory is instrumental and practical, as distinguished from poetic or literary composition, which traditionally aims at beauty and pleasure. The orator in his purpose and technique is primarily persuasive rather than informative or entertaining. The study will cover not only different types of speeches, but also, the topics, which are of wider human interest and appeal and the superb use of the language, technique and emotive power of the orators.

KEYWORDS: Speeches, Literary form, Oratory, Rhetoric, Articulation etc.
INTRODUCTION
Speech is the faculty or power of speaking; oral communication; ability to express one’s thoughts, views, opinions and emotions by speech, sounds, and gestures. Generally delivered in the form of an address or dialogue. Speech has a long tradition right from the ancient period down to the present one. The skill in speaking was an important aspect of the curriculum in the ancient period. In this study my chief concern is to prove speeches or oratory as a form of literature. According to John Murley:
“...with a certain largeness, sanity and attraction of form...Poets, dramatists, humourists, satirists, masters of fiction, the great preachers, the character writers, the maxim writers, the great political orators, they are all literature in so far as they teach us to know man and know human nature. This is what makes literature, rightly sifted, selected and rightly studied.” (p. 11)
Thus, in concise, literature is humane speech which has lasting values, dignity of purpose, credence of idea, and beauty of form. The oratory, the rationale and practice of persuasive public speaking, it is immediate in its orator-audience relationship and reactions. The orator may become the voice of political or social history. An oration involves a speaker, an audience, a background of time, place and other conditions, a message; transmission by voice, articulation, and bodily accompaniments; and may, or may not, have an immediate outcome.
Rhetoric or the art of oratory is the art of using words effectively. Oratory is instrumental and practical, as distinguished from poetic or literary composition, which traditionally aims at beauty and pleasure. The orator in his purpose and technique is primarily persuasive rather than informative or entertaining. An attempt is made to change human behaviour or to strengthen convictions and attitudes. The orator would correct wrong positions of the audience and establish psychological patterns favourable to his own wishes. Arguments and rhetorical devices are used. Exposition is employed to clarify and enforce the orator’s propositions and anecdotes and illustrations are used to heighten the effect of the speech. The orator need not be a first-rate logician, through a capacity for good, clear thought helps to penetrate into the causes and results. Effective debaters, who depend more heavily on logic, however, are not always impressive orators because superior eloquence also requires strong appeals to the motives, sentiments, and habits of the audience. Oratorical greatness is invariably identified with strong emotional phrasing and delivery. When the intellectual qualities dominate with relative absence of the affective, the oration fails just as it does when emotion sweeps aside reason.
SPEECHES AS A LITERARY GENRE

The ideal orator is personal in his appeals and strong in ethical proofs, rather than objective or detached. He enforces his arguments by his personal commitment to his goal. In the Encyclopedia Britannica, oratory is divided into four types: “(1) Forensic (2) Deliberative (3) Occasional and (4) Didactic or Philosophical” (20:785). Classical rhetoricians divide oratory into three distinct kinds: (1) Deliberative oratory, generally calculated to persuade the audience to a particular course of action or point of view (2) Forensic, judicial, or legal oratory, concerned with the legal and quasi-legal accusation and defense and (3) Panegyric or Epideictic oratory, concerned respectively with praise or blame. L.T. Lemon writes:

The effect of a work of literature or oratory will depend very largely upon the words an author uses to suggest his themes, describe his characters, and make a world for the reader, some sense of the possibilities of diction – word choice- is essential. (Glossary 68)

Austin says that “in speaking or writing, we perform simultaneously three and sometimes four speech acts: (1) utter a sentence (2) refer to an object (3) perform an elocutionary act (4) perform a perlocutionary act” (Abrams, 292).

Typically, forensic, or legal oratory is at its best in the defence of individual freedom and resistance to prosecution. It was the most characteristic type of oratory in ancient Athens, where laws stipulated that litigants should defend their own causes. In the 1st century BC Rome, Cicero was the foremost forensic orator and exerted a lasting influence on later Western oratory and prose style. Demosthenes the Athenian lawyer, soldier, and statesman was a great deliberative orator.

The third division of persuasive speaking, epideictic, or ceremonial, oratory was panegyrical, declamatory, and demonstrative. Its aim was to eulogize an individual, a cause, occasion, movement, city or state, or to condemn them. Prominent in ancient Greece were the funeral orations in honour of those killed in battle. The 19th–century American speaker Daniel Webster excelled in all the three major divisions – forensic, deliberative, and epideictic oratory.

Another major type of persuasive speaking that developed later was religious oratory. For more than 1,000 years after Cicero the important orators were churchmen rather than politicians, lawyers, or military spokesmen. As delivery habits changed, so did the oratorical language. Alliteration, antithesis, parallelism, and other rhetorical figures of thought and language are sometimes carried to extremes- in speeches addressed to those highly trained in Latin and Greek language traditions. These devices gave way to the clarity of style.

Aristotle, the lawgiver, has divided oratory into three categories as discussed above to suit the specific occasion and purposes to which oration have to be addressed. The great liberal
parliamentarians and thinkers of the 18th and 19th century England used the medium for moulding and seasoning the otherwise conflicting voices of the conflicting times. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ranade, Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda and M.K. Gandhi used the precedence to eloquent success and not only buttressed the cause of Indian self-realization, but even saw the dreams of a resurgent India in the heyday of the British Empire. For instance, Vivekananda’s oratory was a combination of all types of oratory. Though elements of all these forms of oratory can be traced in his speeches, he can be called by and large a philosophical orator, his speeches at the Parliament and some other speeches in which he defended Hinduism as forensic oratory, his speeches on the opening and closing day of the Parliament of Religions as occasional, his lectures on “Women in India”, “The Great Teachers of the World”, “On Lord Buddha”, “Christ, My Master” as panegyric and others as philosophical. The evidence of panegyric oratory can be easily noticed in his Lectures from Colombo to Almora. Above all, a Vedantic flame burns throughout his speeches. Even when he speaks on “My Master,” he paints his sketch in the background of Hindu religion, culture and tradition. Therefore, we may well appreciate his oratory in the light of the guiding principles laid down by the classical masters. Ancient rhetoric consists of five parts, Invention, Disposition, Elocution, Memory and Delivery. In one form or other these are present in his oratory. He was ingenious in inventing arguments, skilled in arranging his ideas in order leading them to a logical conclusion and his memory was unique as he spoke without any note or preparation. For the delivery and elocution he was widely praised. Appeal Avalanche reports:

**The speaker differs in one respect in particular from some American orators. He advances his ideas with as much deliberation as a professor of mathematics demonstrates an example in algebra to his students.** (Works VII: 419)

The audience responded to his first address “Sisters and Brothers of America” with aplomb that lasted for a few minutes. As for his words, they are emotionally charged, well picked up and ‘sensational’. To quote a few emotive lines from his addresses at the Parliament:

**It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world: I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.** (Works I: 3)

The magnificence of the address lays in two things- first the negative capability of the speaker and seconds the emotive language. By using ‘us’ instead of ‘me’ he turns the welcome given to him to all. Again, he thanks, but in the name of somebody else. The emphasis is on ‘millions and millions of Hindus.’ The message implied in it is that the Hindu religion is ‘stretching its arms’ to embrace all.
Whatever applause is given to him, being an emulator of the Gita, he cannot attach himself to it. It was not he but ‘the religious consciousness of India that spoke through him.’ Secondly, the structural parallelism strengthened by the repetition of the principal clause “I thank you” creates a sonorous rhythmic effect on the mind of the audience.

By the artistic arrangement of words, fully charged with evocative spirit and by invocations and exclamations, all this makes it a classical piece of oratory. Vivekananda’s language is milder and sentences are short and simple. About his speeches at the Parliament, it may be said that he employed a simple style for stirring the audiences’ mind and reaching the people. He was very much conscious of the theory of decorum. At the Parliament, he spoke in the language of the people devoid of all technicalities and obscurity. He read the English translation of Sanskrit Verse from the scriptures. Though he had a good knowledge of Latin and French he did not use Latin and French words and expressions. About his language, Marie Louise Burke writes:

He deliberately couched his message in language as simple and nontechnical as possible, for his intention was to reach the people with words and ideas meaningful to all. He was a World Teacher not a pedant. (Burke, 94)

But when the occasion called for a scholarly presentation of Hinduism, as it did at the Scientific Section, where sharp-minded philosophers, theologians and scholars came to learn and perhaps to challenge, he received so much ovation and acclamation that it made him weep. His favourite rhetorical devices are: repetition of words, ideas and quotations, allusions, and references to the scriptures, questions followed by answers and at times, rhetorical questions, illustrations, simple and hypothetical sentence structures, images and figures of speech. These are frequently used devices. Besides these, we cannot overlook the use of Sanskrit words, pauses, digressions and other linguistic and stylistic devices.

Swamiji belongs to the ‘liberal’ school of orators and bears the impact of Macaulay on his prose-style in amplitude and richness of phrasing and weight of miscellaneous learning. But there are hardly any artifice and embellishments. That is why he abandons the severity of treatises and speaks or writes not for the specialists, as Aristotle or in modern times T.S. Eliot did, but for all. The former advocates the spread of culture and religions ‘deluge the world with religion’ while the latter wants to preserve it by not letting it come to the commoners. Being a preacher, he had to reach the people and hence in art he comes close to Leo Tolstoy, who stressed on the aspect of communication in art. Like Donne, he is more concerned with his material—the delivery of his thoughts. He says:

What matters it whether you speak correct grammar or with fine rhetoric? What matters it whether your language is ornamental or not? The question is whether or not you have anything to
give... If you have, then give. Words but convey the gift: it is but one of the many modes. (Works IV: 123-24)

C.D. Narasimhaiah, in his book The Swan and The Eagle remarks that the linguist’s formulations arise out of a body of written literature and spoken word yet to be rendered in writing. How do we define literature and identify literary qualities? What transforms or makes a verbal message into a work of art a thing of beauty a text with its own literary texture? Although a clear cut distinction between ordinary day to day communication and literary communication is not possible, yet it is an established fact that even an ordinary statement can assume literary qualities of the content. The famous example of J.L. Austin will make this point clear:

I hereby pronounce you man and wife’, can be said by a priest performing a wedding where it assumes a religious value with no ‘literariness’, but the same statement can be grafted and made part of various situations, like in a play, to give it a literary or fictional value. (Krishnaswamy, Literary 1)

George Steiner has defined literature in negative terms he says that the language of literature is not cryptic like the language of science, it is Delphic i.e. obscure, ambiguous, vague or oracular. According to Ezra Pound all great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree. Jonathan Culler in his book Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction says:

... Works that today are studied as literature in English or Latin classes, in schools and universities were once treated not as a special kind of writing but as fine examples of the use of language and rhetoric. They were instances of a larger category of exemplary practices of writing and thinking, which included speeches, sermons, history, and philosophy. (21)

In the light of these comments and opinions it can be safely asserted that speeches have to be considered as a literary form. Iyengar remarks:

Though the verse is older than prose, but in Indian English Literature, prose precedes the verse. It was only after the talented first generation of Indians learning English used prose for ‘translation, petitioning..., oratory, political agitation, social reform ... etc. (History 519)

The poetry written by Indians appeared on the scene. The early users of English prose fortunately were “men cast on an Olympian mould” (519). But oratory as a form of literature has never died out, it has continued in one form or another- in the oratorical speeches of fictitious characters-say in Brutus, Antonio or in the superb parody of Pickwick Papers or in the law court, parliament, on public pulpit, sometimes effulgent, at others subdued. However, the scientific spirit gradually began to gain ground in this genre. By the nineteenth century the scientific spirit pervaded all forms of art and literature. Moreover, the eighteenth century with its prime orators, the Younger Pitt, Charles, James
Fox, Edmund Burke and Sheridan, who dazzled England with their carefully polished brilliance and the nineteenth century with its preacher Newman, orators like William Thackeray, The Four Georges, John Ruskin, Victor Hugo, Randolph Churchill maintained the sanctity of oratory. Vivekananda, born and brought up in an atmosphere charged with Victorian spirit, was influenced in his oratory in one way or another by the Victorian orators and preachers. That is why he makes a scientific, psychological and humanistic interpretation of Vedanta philosophy. He is perhaps the most analytic, eclectic and scientific of all modern preachers. He has the dramatic power and sincerity of Newman. He argues like him exploring arguments with gentle insistence so as to show the self-contradiction of his opponents. His introspective honesty and controlled irony, the modulated flow of his prose, the assimilation of a scientific spirit in his religious discourses put him among the Victorian preachers. His Movement is identical, in some respects, to the contemporary Oxford movement in England. Both aimed at reviving their respective religions from their state of decadence in which they had fallen. Like Carlyle, he preached renunciation, work and hero-worship. But Swamiji’s heroes were the two extremes- the incarnations and the downtrodden while the Carlyle’s heroes were prophets, kings, poets, aristocrats and the likes. Swamiji, though no less thrilling, convincing and persuasive in the art of oratory than the modern speakers like Winston Churchill, Roosevelt and Nehru, could not get the same popularity and recognition in the literary and public field. It is partly due to the lack of modern facilities.

CONCLUSION

And at last the perusal comes to the conclusion in the light of the above discussions that literature is humane speech which has lasting values, dignity of purpose, credence of idea, and beauty of form. So, it is clear that the literary merit of the orators’ speeches is beyond question, they possess the literary qualities of denotation, connotation and suggestion. They are amusing, informative and, above all, enlightening. Its sublimity of character, concern for the upliftment of the masses, spirit of selfless service and sacrifice and command of the language make speeches a part of the world literature. Thus, it can be safely asserted that speeches have to be considered as a literary form.
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