

**J.M.S. COLLEGE, MUNGER**  
**(A Constituent Unit under Munger University, Munger)**  
**Department of English**  
**B.A. Part-II, English (Hons.)- Paper IV**

**Critical Study of Francis Bacon's "Of Studies"**

Francis Bacon, "the wisest, brightest and meanest of mankind", as Alexander Pope has reverence for him, was the true child of Renaissance. As an essayist, Bacon's fame rests in his prose style that has been variously estimated as Addison praises his grace while Saintsbury admires his dazzling power of rhetoric. His essays are a treasure trove for worldly wisdom, justifying his assertion - "I have taken all knowledge to be my province".

"Of Studies" is the first essay of the first collection of ten essays of Francis Bacon, which was published in 1597. But it was revised for the edition of 1612. More than dozen new sentences were added and some words were also altered. Bacon's approach towards studies in this essay is purely utilitarian and didactic.

Bacon through a syllogistic tripartite statement begins his argument to validate the usefulness and advantage of study in our life. Bacon has the power of compressing into a few words a great body of thought. Thus he puts forward the three basic purposes of studies: "Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability". He later expands his sentence to bring lucidity and clearness. Studies fill us delight and aesthetic pleasure when we remain private and solitary. While we discourse, our studies add decoration to our speech. Further, the men of study can decide best on the right lines in business and politics. Bacon deprecates too much studies and

the scholar's habit to make his judgment from his reading instead of using his independent views.

Bacon is a consummate artist of Renaissance spirit. Thus he knows the expanse of knowledge and utility of studies. He advocates a scientific enquiry of studies. Through an exquisite metaphor drawn from Botany he compares human mind to a growing plant. As the growing plants need to be pruned and watered and manured for optimum development, the new growing conscience of us are to be tutored, moulded, oriented and devised by studies. But it is experience which ultimately matures our perception and leads us to perfection:

“They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants that need proyning by study”.

Next Bacon considers what persons despise studies and what people praise them and what people make practical use of them. The crafty men condemn studies; simple men admire them while the wise men make ultimate use of it. But it should be remembered that the inquisitive mind and keen observation cultivate the real wisdom. Bacon advises his readers to apply studies to ‘weigh and consider’ rather than useless contradictions and grandiloquence.

In *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon makes systematic classifications of studies and considers different modes to be employed with different kinds of books. In this essay also, Bacon opines that all books are not to be read in the same manner: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested”.

The books according to its value and utility are to be devised into various modes of articulations. The worthy classical pragmatic sort are to be adorned by expertise

reading with diligence while the meaner sort of books or less important books are to be read in summary or by deputy. Again the global span of knowledge is revealed in his analysis of various subjects and their beneficent categories. The scholarly mind of Bacon here makes the subtle observation:

“Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend”.

Studies do not shape a perfect man without the needed conference and writing. “And therefore if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth’ not”. Bacon further tells us that our studies pass into our character (*Abeunt studia in mores*). Rightly so the constitution of our moral disposition is the outcome of our learning and experience.

Every defect of the mind, Bacon says, may be cured by a proper choice of reading. Bacon here draws a parallel between the physical exercise and intellectual exercise. As different games, sports, exercises cure different defects of the body; the different branches of studies cure the incapability of logic, wandering of wit, lack of distinguishing power etc. Bacon emphatically concludes that every defect of the mind may have a special receipt and remedial assurance.

“Of Studies” is typically a Baconian essay with an astonishing terseness, freshness of illustrations, logical analysis, highly Latinized vocabulary, worldly wisdom and Renaissance enlightenment. It is full of warmth and colour, profound wit and knowledge, experience and observation. The aptness of the similes, the witty turn of phrases, the compactness of thought and conciseness of expression are evidence enough of the brightness of Bacon’s intellect. His epigrammatic proverbial form of balance and force, his aphoristic style depending on the device of balance and

antithesis help him express maximum sense in minimum words; and therein lies the charm of his essay.

**Acknowledgement (Sources taken help of):**

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