

## READING ACTIVITY

### Reviewing\*

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- Objective** : To enable readers to engage with a text with a clear focus on reviewing it considering aspects, such as content, form and style of an author as against the usual practice of mechanically reading and subscribing to the viewpoints expressed.
- Participation** : Individual
- Material** : Any text  
Example: *The Argumentative Indian - Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, by Amartya Sen.
- Preparation** : Reading consciously to review a book focusing on key ideas and formulating one's own views on them.

#### Procedure:

- Read the book to be reviewed carefully, taking down notes. Amartya Sen in his book, *The Argumentative Indian*, states many significant ideas and one of those is this: 'while there is skepticism now against Indians' capacity for the culture of arguments and counterarguments, he clarifies right at the beginning the ancient Indian argumentative tradition, quoting the debate between Arjuna and Krishna in the war scene of *The Mahabharata*. Ideas such as these are worth summing up in a review. *As summary is a vital part of a review, all the key ideas have to be included*, which should render a sense to the reader of having gone through the book oneself.
- *A review should also focus on the format of the book and comment on the way the different sections are arranged.* As this book is a collection of sixteen essays under four headings – Voice and Heterodoxy; Culture and Communication; Politics and Protest; and Reason and Identity – which have 4 essays each, written over a period of a decade, the reviewer should deal with Sen's views on these topics and express his views on the arrangement.
- *The style of the writer is often commented upon elaborately in a review.* The reviewer generally considers aspects, such as whether the style is appropriate to the content dealt with, whether the ideas are logically developed, whether the language is clear and convincing to readers, whether the writer achieves the intended purpose and so on. For instance, a reviewer states, "With incisive wit and logic, Sen also combats the crude, insecure, and bellicose idea of a Hindu India promoted by the Hindutva movement. He derides their pathetic attempts at rewriting history and inventing a glorified Hindu past that never was."
- *Yet another significant component is the reviewer's own opinions.* There are reviews which complain against the repetitious nature of the book and the writer's constant reference only to the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. One reviewer goes to the extent of comparing this book with Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, which also deals with the same aspects and concludes noting that Sen's book is "disappointingly shallow". A review should emphasize both the merits and the demerits of the book, and not highlight any one aspect. Depending on the review, there are readers who decide whether to read the book or not. So, a reviewer has to be objective in his analysis and not bring in his own prejudices and biases, which may mar the reputation/sale of the book in the market.

#### Learning outcomes:

- 1) Learners recognize that reviewing demands a far more serious reading than a casual one as it has to look critically at different aspects of a text.
- 2) Learners realize that reviewing requires some amount of familiarity with the area, though not necessarily to the extent that the writer knows it, to comment upon the book authoritatively.

#### Further reading:

Reading any text with an explicit focus on reviewing, including textbooks, by students.

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**\*Reviewing:** Reviewing is a critical evaluation of a book, film, play, an essay, and so on. 'Critical' does not mean pointing out the flaws of someone or something. A review of a book, for example, has two broad aims: a) a summary of the book, highlighting the key ideas, in the words of the reviewer although quotes can appear sparingly; and b) a reviewer's (critical) opinions on the book and its contents. A well-written review gives the impression that the reviewer has gone through the book personally.