



COURSE CODE: MAEGD 301
COURSE NAME: LITERARY AND
CRITICAL THEORY II

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND
ONLINE EDUCATION
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

MASTER OF ARTS

**ENGLISH
BLOCK II**



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MEG 301: Literary and Critical Theory II

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BLOCK II

MODULE III: STRUCTURALISM & POST-STRUCTURALISM

UNIT 7: STRUCTURALISM AND SEMIOTICS

UNIT 8: STRUCTURALIST LINGUISTICS, ANTHROPOLOGY AND NARRATOLOGY

UNIT 9: POST-STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

UNIT 10: NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL MATERIALISM

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UNIT 11: SOCIETY AND LITERATURE AND SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION: BLOCK II

Block II will introduce you with Structuralism and Post-structuralism, Socio-cultural Theory and criticism and finally Post-colonial theory and criticism

MODULE III: Structuralism & Post-structuralism is divided into four units. **Unit 7: *Structuralism and Semiotics (Key Figures, Ideas and Applications)*** will introduce you to Structuralism. Unlike New Criticism, Structuralism is not interested in literary quality or interpretation of a text. It instead investigates to find the language of literary texts, the governing rules by which fundamental literary elements are identified; in other words, it seeks the grammar which allows the texts to make meaning. This unit will explore all these in detail. **Unit 8: *Structuralist Linguistics (Saussure), Anthropology (Levi-Strauss) and Narratology (Propp, Barthes, Genette)*** will be introducing you to the rise of structuralism across different disciplines as an important parts of linguistics, anthropology and narratology and contributions of major exponents of these areas to develop structuralism. **Unit 9: *Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction (Derrida, Foucault, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom: Key Ideas and Applications)***
Unit 10: New Historicism and Cultural materialism

MODULE IV: Socio-cultural Theory and Criticism Sociocultural theory is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. Sociocultural theory also suggests that human learning is largely a social process. **Unit 11: *Society and Literature and Sociology of Literature*** will try to make you familiar with the relation between Literature, sociology and society. As all deal with the same social, political and economic issues. Society is the common ground for both the disciplines. Sociology is the scientific study of man, the study of social institutions and of social processes. Likewise, literature is also considered as a faithful mirror of society. You will be able to learn how all the three work together as a powerful force. **Unit 12: *Marxist Theory and the Centrality of Ideology*** will explore one of the important and influential sociological criticism, Marxist criticism which emphasizes the

ideological underpinnings of literature. Along with that we shall also acquaint you with theories like New Historicism and Feminism as a part critical theory.

MODULE V: Postcolonial Theory and Criticism briefly surveys how postcolonial theory or criticism developed as a distinctive critical field around the last decade of the twentieth century as a result of certain changes that came to be discerned in the approaches, methods and ways of study in the fields of literature, sociology, anthropology and other branches of social sciences.

Unit 13: Postcolonial Theory and Criticism: Contexts, Key Terms and Figures deals with Postcolonial Theory and its significant traits as well as the key concepts and figures associated with it. Edward Said is considered one of the most important figures in postcolonial theory owing to his critique of colonial discourse which he had represented in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). **Unit 14: Edward Said: Frames for Re-Reading the Canon** will enable you to know how according to Said's *Orientalism*, cultural politics plays a very decisive role in the 'production of academic knowledge' and that it is very often the ideological position and the situational context of the colonisers which influenced such 'knowledge' and the values associated with it. Major contentions of Orientalism will be the core of discussion of this unit.

MODULE III: STRUCTURALISM & POST-STRUCTURALISM

UNIT 7: STRUCTURALISM AND SEMIOTICS (KEY FIGURES, IDEAS AND APPLICATIONS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.0 Introduction: Structuralism

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Structuralism and Literature

7.2.1 Key figures

7.3 Semiotics: Introduction

7.3.2 Key figures, Ideas and Applications

7.4 Summing Up

7.5 Assessment Questions

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7.0 STRUCTURALISM: INTRODUCTION

Structuralism as a term is derived from ‘structure,’ meaning a form or system. However, the commonplace idea of ‘structure’ does not corroborate the critical perspectives involved in structuralism, as in case a theory to interpret the literary object.

The historical beginnings of structuralism are witnessed, in the early twentieth century, in the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). His insights were further developed by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, French cultural critic Roland Barthes and many others. Prior to Saussure and others, the contributions of Giambattista Vico, Jean Piaget and literary Formalists were distinct formations towards the conception of structuralism, the reading of which fostered its early development. But structuralism as an interdisciplinary movement and as an analytical methodology came into force only in the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the literary histories of the New Criticism, Myth Criticism and psychoanalytical criticism of the 1940s to the mid-1960s, interacted with

structuralism in its early movement. In the 1950s, structuralism posed a sustained critical challenge to the New Criticism. These early critical approaches to literature were formalist in their own distinct ways. They emphasized on universal myths, rituals and folktales while remaining cynical of scientism, empiricism and positivism. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* held that literary criticism viewed literature itself as a system. For example, the *mythoi* of spring, summer, autumn, and winter gave rise to fundamental literary modes such as comedy, tragedy, irony, and romance. On reflecting on the studies of Levi-Strauss and Freud, it can be said that there is no original myth, no single true version of myth, of which all the others are copies or distortions. On the contrary, every version belongs to the myth. They held that the logic behind mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science; for them, the difference, or apparent improvement, lies not in the progress of man's mind but in the discovery of new areas to which it may apply (Habib 631-2). Thus, these thinkers belonging to various disciplines of anthropology, psychoanalysis, and myth literature conceived the human world, even the human mind, as a system, subjecting it to objective explanations.

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will lay the foundation of the literary theory Structuralism. It will familiarize the readers with:

- key ideas and applications of structuralist concepts
- the major figures behind the ideas
- the significance of semiotics and structures
- the interdisciplinary nature of structuralism and semiotics

7.2 STRUCTURALISM AND LITERATURE

A word may be said about the implications of structuralism for literature before winding up the topic. The relation between literature as a field of study and structuralism as a method of analysis is axiomatic. More than poetry and

drama, narratives invite structuralist criticism, since narrative forms share certain structural features, such as plot, setting and character.

Structuralism does not seek to prove if a given text is good literature in the first place. It instead investigates to find the *langue* of literary texts, the governing rules by which fundamental literary elements are identified; in other words, it seeks the grammar which allows the texts to make meaning. Issues such as of interpretation and literary quality are limited only to the domain of surface phenomenon, the domain of parole. In short, structuralists focus on how a text controls its narrative, rather than what it strives to signify. In this regard, structuralist criticism and reader- response theory share a common platform. However, while both the critical frameworks seek to know the underlying structure of human experience, structuralism focuses on the *langue* side, the universal structures of human consciousness, and reader-response criticism tries to understand the reader's experience, say the *parole* side.

Let us remember the fact that structuralists are not interested in knowing whether or not a literary text is great or moral literature. Their focus is on the structures (laws) that underlie literary narratives and generate meaning. All structuralists do not interpret in the same way, even if they use the same approach. Their analyses reveal some fundamental connections between structures of literature and that of language, and further among the structures of cultural phenomena such as literature, art, social rituals, fashion, sports, mythology, advertising and forms of entertainment. (Tyson 220-233)

A brief discussion on the ideas of Vico and Jean Piaget about structure may be of particular interest keeping in view the previous thinkers' contribution to the earlier conception of structure.

7.2.1 KEY FIGURES

Giambattista Vico

The Italian philosopher and rhetorician Vico's structural idea may be framed briefly as: it is man who constructs the myths, social institutions, and virtually the whole world as he perceives it, and so in the process he constructs himself. Once 'structured' by man, the world turns out to be a potent agency for

continuous structuring: its customs and practices act as a forceful mechanism which produces familiarity of habitually recognizing and perceiving this man-made world as artless and 'natural'. Hawkes would like to explain, as in the existentialists' so in Vico's belief, there is no pre-existent, 'given' human essence, no predetermined 'human nature'. Like Marxists, Vico is convinced that particular forms of the human world are determined by particular social relations and systems of human institutions. He further seems to hold that man has the faculty of poetic wisdom to use the language metaphorically and constructs creative myths out of dealing with the material world. In a nutshell, his conviction underlines that to be human is to be a structuralist. (Hawkes 4)

'There must', Vico insists, 'in the nature of human institutions be a mental language common to all nations which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects' (161). This 'mental language' manifests itself as man's universal capacity not only to formulate structures, but also to submit his own nature to the demands of their structuring.

Jean Piaget

The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget in his *Structuralism* explains that structure is an arrangement of entities which embodies the following fundamental ideas:

(i) the idea of wholeness; (ii) of transformation; and (iii) of self-regulation.

The idea of *wholeness* designates the sense of integrated coherence. The whole is different from the sum of its parts. Its internal coherence demands that the arrangement of entities be complete in itself and does not pertain to a composite formed of otherwise independent elements. Its constituent parts will conform to a set of intrinsic laws which determine its nature and theirs. These laws confer on the constituent parts within the structure overall properties larger than those each individually possesses outside it. For example, water is a whole different from oxygen and hydrogen, its constituents. Thus a *structure* is quite different from an *aggregate*: its constituent parts have no genuinely independent existence outside the structure in the same form that they have within it.

Transformation means that the structure or system is capable of transforming individual properties. It is not a static or passive form. So it ensures that language, a basic human structure, is capable of transforming various fundamental phonemes into the widest variety of new utterances while retaining these within its own particular structure. In short, the linguistic system is not merely a structure (a noun); it also structures (a verb).

Finally, structure is *self-regulating* in the sense that it makes no appeals beyond itself; the elements engendered by transformations always belong to the system and validate its laws. (Hawkes 5)

Ferdinand De Saussure

Most of us are aware of the familiar notion of language that it is a naming process, an aggregate of separate units, called ‘words’, and each of which has a separate ‘meaning’ essential to it. This had been the prevalent academic practice until Saussure appeared in the scene of linguistics. His study understood language rather as a structural system of relationships among words as used at a given point in time. Earlier, the whole of language was subjected to a *diachronic* or historical study by recording laws of change. Saussure’s revolutionary contribution consists in his modernizing the study of language with a shift in perspective.

He argued that language can also be studied *synchronically*, i.e., by taking language as a gestalt, or a self-sufficient system, wherein the relationship between constitutive parts of a total, unified field is significant in forming meanings that we perceive (Hawkes 9). He observes that any speaker of a language at the moment is hardly aware of its history; rather each language exists as a system of sounds produced in its present form by people who speak and practice it in real life.


These points and other premises of language are recorded in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). The book was published posthumously in 1916, which was an account actually put together from his students’ notes, extracted from a series of lectures that he delivered at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911.

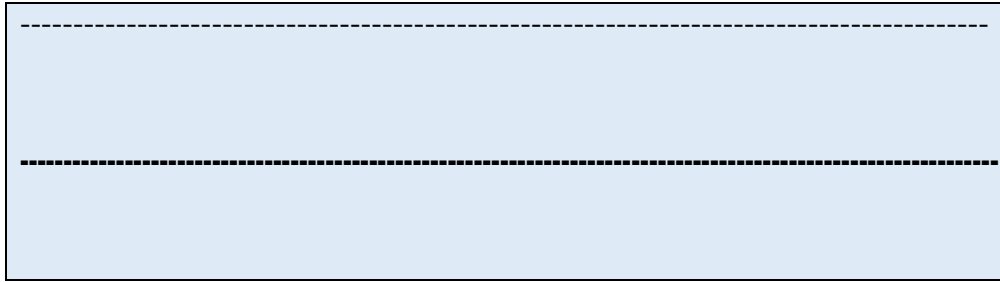
Saussure's contribution is significant in the context that he distinguished *langue*, (distinguished from *language*) the system of language as a whole, from *parole*, the individual speeches or articulations; the latter being only a spoken utterance, or performance partly at any given moment of the system *langue*. Any speech act to be the subject of serious scientific inquiry, Saussure emphasized, must consider the priority of *langue*, since it unfolds the governing rules that underlie the distinct kinds of speech and discourse. Saussure himself has given an analogy to draw the distinction between the abstract set of rules and conventions called 'chess', and the actual concrete games of chess played by people. The rules of chess exist above and beyond each individual game, and yet they ever acquire concrete form only in the relationships that develop between the pieces in individual games. So with language. This phenomenon may well be explained in other words that the nature of the *langue* looms large already, lies beyond, and determines, the nature of each manifestation of *parole*, yet it has no concrete existence of its own, except in the piecemeal manifestations that individual speech could afford. In short, *parole* reveals *langue* the underlying system of codes and rules (Hawkes 9). This analysis has a definite bearing on studying literature. This would apply to literature as a whole system of which individual literary works like *parole* are structured.

A later generation of linguists rephrased Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* as 'linguistic competence' versus 'linguistic performance' (Hawkes 9). This whole system or order of rules being implied in manifested usages or speech acts remains central to structuralist thought, even as it spreads out from linguistics to anthropology and philosophy and to literary criticism through the course of the twentieth century. It is therefore useful to know some of the fundamental notions relevant to structuralism, because the structural laws relate critically to our literary discourse.

Saussure conceived language as a fundamental "system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological." Language within a heterogeneous mass of speech acts can be a local phenomenon when "an auditory image becomes associated with a concept. It is the social side of speech, outside the individual

who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community” (*Course in General Linguistics*). Thus, through his insights on sign and language he initiated modern study of linguistics.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS	
	<p>1. What is langue and parole?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. What is a sign?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. What are the six functions of language?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>



7.3 SEMIOTICS: INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is generally known as the study of signs (Greek *semeion*, “sign”). Umberto Eco however widened its definition and defined it as anything that can be considered as sign system. This includes words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. The Swiss linguist Saussure and American philosopher Pierce is known widely for establishing the words “semiology” and “semiotics” respectively. What Saussure called a science which studies the role of signs in social life, Pierce calls it a formal doctrine of signs, thereby associating it with John Locke’s logic. Semiotics is an umbrella term and it heavily draws from linguistic concepts. Through the study of semiotics, we become aware of the signs, codes, message-making system.

7.3.1 Key figures, Ideas and Applications

C.S Pierce

This American philosopher is known for his pragmatic philosophy. He developed the Sign Theory. He defines sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which is termed as ‘interpretant’. Thus the latter is thereby immediately determined by the former. According to Pierce, a sign is made up of three parts: a sign, an object, and an interpretant. The representamen/signifier is the symbol, the form of the sign. The referent/object is what the sign stands for or represents. The interpretant/signified is the sense made of the sign. The process of signification (the three parts culminating into sign) assumes a triadic relation called semiosis.

Jonathan Culler

Jonathan Culler asserts that the structuralist method offers a controlling and regulative framework for a critic who would otherwise slip into his personal virtuosity as the dependable guide. According to him, the structural system that governs both the writer and the interpretation of literary texts is the system of rules and codes. His *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) aims to reconcile the structuralist theory with an intuitive approach of the 'competent' reader to texts. The matter of *impersonality* and aesthetic distance in creative arts is only a code that enables all the following codes to come to play. (Tyson 231)

Culler's pursuits seem to be based on the traditional ideas of the text as containing stable meanings and the critic as a faithful seeker of interpretive structures underlying the text. This would fairly prove Culler's doubts about radical claims of the poststructuralist's such as Derrida's inclinations to undermine all stable structures and essentialist meanings. (Norris 2/3) He posits like Stanley Fish that the reader should be 'competent' having mastery of the literary system (Culler 140), and distinguishes two kinds of readers: "the readers as field of experience for the critic (himself a reader)" and the future readers who will benefit from the work of the critics and previous readers.

Roman Jakobson

He defined semiotics as something that deals with those general principles which underlie the structure of all signs; which includes their utilization within messages, as well as with the specifics of the various sign systems and of the diverse messages using those different kinds of signs. Jakobson saw semiotics as structuralist semiotics and language itself as a semiotic system.

Jakobson developed a model of communication, which talks about the constitutive elements in the function of language. The model has the following parts: (1) context, (2) addresser (sender), (3) addressee (receiver), (4) contact, (5) common code and (6) message. The contextual meaning is the situational meaning, the sender sends a message to the receiver, the contact is the way of communication and the code is the sign.

The functions can also be pointed in the following manner (1) referential is how the message is related to the world, it is the context, it imparts information (2) emotive is the feeling and attitude of the sender, it is related to the addresser (3) conative is how the receiver responds, it is related to the addressee, influencing behaviour (4) phatic establishes a bond, maintains social relationships, it is the contact (5) metalingual tells about how the language works, it is the code, referring to the nature of the interaction; and (6) poetic is the form and style of message.

LET US STOP AND THINK



Structuralist critics while dealing with narratives relate the chosen text to some larger universal structure. For example if a structuralist is analysing a poem, the critic would start with the conventions of its genre and gradually proceed towards the parallels followed in its plot or the recurrent patterns in its language. Such an incline towards the abstract issues of genre, history and philosophy did not impress the traditional critics. They opined that it took them away from the text. In the light of this information it is important to understand the relevance of structuralism to academics and society.

7.4 SUMMING UP

The study of a cultural phenomenon, communication, social message, falls under the umbrella term of semiotics. Right from John Locke's term *sem(e)iotike* in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, semiotics as a term became popular and have been an important discourse of interpretation. Jonathan Culler's *Pursuit of Signs*, Umberto Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics*, Roland Barthes' *Elements of Semiology*, are primary contributions in this field.



7.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Elaborately describe the six functions of language.
2. Define semiotics.
3. Explain the sign system of C.S Pierce. How is it different from Saussure?
4. How is semiotics related to structuralism?



7.6 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 8: STRUCTURALIST LINGUISTICS, ANTHROPOLOGY AND NARRATOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.0 Introduction: Structuralist Linguistics and Saussure

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Structuralism in the Anthropologist Levi-Strauss

8.3 Narratology

8.3.1 Propp

8.3.2 Barthes

8.3.3 Genette

8.4 Summing Up

8.5 Assessment Questions

8.6 References and Recommended Readings

8.0 STRUCTURALIST LINGUISTICS AND FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913) is a Swiss linguist particularly known for his contribution in the field of semiotics/semiology and structuralism. His major work is *Cours de Linguistiques Generale* (1916).

He mentioned the following features of language:

- Language is a structured system.
- It is a well-defined entity.
- Language as a structured system is a self-contained whole.
- It is homogeneous in nature.
- It can be studied independently.
- Linguistic structure of a language system is not less real than a speech.
- Language is an instrument of cognizance. It is used to make sense of objects by name.
- It is a part of social institutions and such should be studied in an in-depth approach.

His major contributions are discussed in points:

1. **Sign, Signified, Signifier:** A sign(object/thing) is the unity of a signifier and a signified. A signifier is the physical existence, in the form of sound, word, and image. The signified is the mental concept of the thing. The referent is the term used for the real item/thing. The signified cannot exist without the signifier. According to structuralism the signifier reaches the signified and this produces meaning or signification. These relationships construct the idea of semiotics/ study of signs. Saussure is of the opinion that 'signs' always have syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship. The signs are horizontally and vertically bound to one another.
2. **Diachronic and Synchronic:** The diachronic system happens over a period of time, from the angle of a historical development and comparative linguistics; while synchronic system happens at a point of time, from a theoretic viewpoint, treating the contemporary use of language and not considering the evolution of language. Saussure prefers the synchronic study of a language.
3. **Langue and Parole:** Langue is the system of all the languages that exist in the world. Saussure tries to explain the concept of Langue and Parole by taking the example of chess. The rules of chess can be considered as Langue and their use by a particular player will be Parole.

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be introduced to the rise of structuralism across different disciplines. Structures are important parts of linguistics, anthropology and narratology. To this end the unit will:

- Familiarize you with the impact of structures in different areas of knowledge
- Enable you to understand the works of the people associated with structuralism
- Acquaint you with new terms which explain the core of structuralism
- Understand the interdisciplinary stance of the theory of structuralism

LET US STOP AND THINK



- “In language there are only differences.” A difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is figured out; “but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*.”
- Two signs, each having a signified and a signifier are not different but only distinct.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1908 – 2009)

This Belgium-born French anthropologist and ethnologist is well known for his structuralist interpretation of the society. His major works are: *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), *Structural Anthropology* (1958), *The Savage Mind* (1966), *Mythologiques I–IV*, etc. Strauss pioneered a branch of anthropology called cultural anthropology.

His key concepts are:

1. There are binaries existing in the society. These opposites define a particular structure in the society. For example: black-white, action-inaction, peace-war, strong-weak, man-nature, domestic-foreign, good-evil. These opposites are always in conflict. They create the climax of any narrative.
2. He has discussed in detail the binary relation between the "savage" mind and the "civilized" mind. The savage mind is the untamed mind, which according to him is distinct from a mind that is cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return. He associates the savage with the term, bricoleur, who assembles any material around him and creates a thing. While the civilized is the scientific mind, the mind of the engineer, who asks a question and tries to design an optimal or complete solution. This notion of binary opposition has been challenged by Jacques Derrida in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play".

3. He shifts the importance of linguistic structure from the conscious to the unconscious.
4. He gives importance to myths, as the basic structure of all narratives. There are many versions in myths. They resist history. They are eternal in nature. Myth reconciles between the synchronic and the diachronic languages.
5. He also introduced the concept of mythemes, which in mythology is a fundamental generic unit of narrative structure from which myths are thought to be constructed. It is a minimal unit that is always found shared with other, related mythemes and reassembled in various ways or linked in more complicated relationships.
6. He did a cross cultural analysis of kinship. This kinship system, like a language system, exists in human consciousness. It is arbitrary in nature. He talked about the role of exchange and reciprocity in human relationships.

8.3 NARRATOLOGY

It is the branch of knowledge or criticism that deals with the structure and function of narrative and its themes, conventions, and symbols. It studies the narrative and its structures. The word is associated with the French *narratologie*, coined by Tzvetan Todorov.

Vladimir Propp (1895 -1970)

This Soviet folklorist has been in the forefront for his structuralist analysis of Russian folktales. Some of his major books are: *Morphology of the tale* (1928), *Historical Roots of the wonder tale* (1946), *Russian Epic Song* (1955–1958), *Popular Lyric Songs* (1961), *Russian Agrarian Feasts* (1963), *Problems of comedy and laughter* (1983), *The Russian Folktale* (1984).

Based on his analysis of fairy tales and folktales, he concluded seven major characters in the frame of any story. They are:

- The hero: He is mostly the protagonist of the story, who fights the villain and weds the princess at the end
- The villain: One who creates troubles for the hero, evil-doer
- The princess: She is the prize of the story; she is made to wed the hero despite of multiple hindrances created by the villain
- The dispatcher: A character who understands the need of the quest of the hero and helps him to undertake his journey
- The helper: The one who invokes magical elements that come to help the hero
- The donor: The character who aids in handing over the magical element to the hero or prepares him to take charge of it.
- The false hero: One who is a trickster, and tries to take credit of the hero's deeds or marry the princess.

Every story has its narrative elements, units or narratemes. However, we can find a commonality of structure. Propp remarks that there are thirty one common narrative elements or functions in any story. They are:

- Absentation: after the Initial Situation where the hero and the family members are introduced, we have one of the members in the family, or the hero himself, who leaves the security of the home environment
- Interdiction: the hero is warned, or forbidden to do an action
- Violation: the hero violates a forbidden rule
- Reconnaissance: the villain makes attempt to get information
- Delivery: the villain gets information about his victim
- Trickery: the villain tries to deceive his victim
- Complicity: the victim is deceived
- Villainy and Lacking: villain causes harm to a member of the family and the hero feels that they lack something in their home to fight this villain
- Mediation: misfortune is made known, and the hero is dispatched
- Counteraction: hero decides to counteract
- Departure: the hero leaves home

- 1st Donor Function: hero is tested, receives magical help
- Hero's reaction: hero responds to the actions of the donor
- Receipt of Agent: hero avails the use of magical agent as a reward for his good actions
- Spacial Change: hero led to object of search
- Struggle: direct combat of hero and villain
- Branding: hero is branded
- Victory: villain is defeated
- Liquidation: misfortunes or issues are settled
- Return: hero returns
- Pursuit/ Chase: hero is pursued
- Rescue: hero is rescued from pursuit
- Unrecognized arrival: hero arrives home, but is unrecognized
- Unfounded claims: false hero presents unfounded claims
- Difficult task: hero faces difficult tasks
- Solution: task is resolved
- Recognition: hero is recognised
- Exposure: false hero or villain is exposed
- Transfiguration: hero receives a new appearance
- Punishment: the evil-doers are punished
- Wedding: hero marries/ gets the throne

Roland Barthes (1915-80)

Roland Barthes's early works developed upon the theory of structuralism and semiotics immensely. He is well known for his famous essay "The Death of the Author". However, later in life he also worked on the ideas of poststructuralism. Some of his major works of this influential French philosopher and literary critic are: *The Fashion System* (1967), *Writing Degree Zero* (1968), *Mythologies* (1972), *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975), *S/Z: An Essay* (1975), *Image—Music—Text* (1977), *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977).

Some of his key terms/concepts are discussed in the following:

1. Work and text are two different terms. Work is concrete, an object of consumption, caught in a process of filiation. While text is plural, intertextual, creates meanings, and subverts old categories.
2. He assigns two categories of texts: the writerly (writable) text and readerly (readable) text. The writerly texts can be creatively understood by the readers, with a possibility of interpreting newer meanings; but in the readerly texts readers are restricted to the meaning intended by the writer in a linear way. This is executed in his book *S/Z (1970)*, where he discusses about the ideal kind of text. The readerly text is a product of the god-author meant to be consumed in a particular way without questioning its authority, while the writerly text is infinite; it has spaces and meanings that are to be edited by the reader, while reading it. The reader tends to become the new writer.
3. In his essay “The Death of the Author” he opposes the idea of interpreting any work on the basis of the ethnicity, education, caste, identity and cultural background of an author. Instead, the importance is given to the reader, the interpreter, who decides on meanings. Signification is a part of reading which is made possible by the understanding of the reader instead of the overarching meaning of the author himself. So the “birth” of the reader is at the cost of the “death” of the author.
4. In his book *The Fashion System*, he shows how various signs and symbols has denotative meanings and can reinterpreted in different ways.
5. He also differs between the traditional “author” and the newly formed ‘scripter’. According to him the author is no longer the ultimate power that governs the signification of the text, although he is assumed to be a godlike figure that has an authority over it. The scripter is however an assembler, who combines pre-existing materials (rules, norms, convention, texts, thoughts) and constructs a new text. The writer’s life history is no longer important in the reading of our text. The scripter is the new writer whose birth is associated only with the text and no other past events.
6. There are five codes in a narrative:

- Hermeneutic: any element in a story that is not explained and, therefore, exists as an enigma for the reader
- Proairetic: narrative action
- Cultural: shared knowledge between communities in a culture
- Semic: implementation of additional meanings through connotations
- Symbolic: semantic meanings through binaries (good-bad, old-new)

LET US STOP AND THINK



- Text is a combination, compilation of ideas and assumptions already existing in various centres of culture, but cited in new ways by the scripter.

Gerard Genette (1930 –2018)

This French literary theorist is particularly known for his books: *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* which is a part of the *Figures* series; the trilogy on textual transcendence, which has also been quite influential, is composed of *Introduction à l'architexte* (1979), *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), and *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997). He developed various structures in the act of telling a story, the narration, and in the act of making a story as well.

Some of his important concepts are briefly stated below:

1. The divide between mimesis/mimetic and diegesis is elaborated by Genette, which is an influence of Plato-Aristotle divide. Mimesis is the act of showing or representation. Diegesis is the act of telling. In the art of story making these are the two major ways of framing a story. Mimesis is mostly in direct speech and diegesis in indirect speech or paraphrase. In mimesis the importance is given to the subject which is to be represented or dramatized. In diegesis the importance is given to the narrator and his reporting. The narrator can be all-knowing or a third person.

2. Focalisation is a term used by Genette to talk about the viewpoint or perspective or distance between the narrator and the story. The external focalisation is the evident one, where characters say or do things. The internal focalization involves the act of thinking or feeling in the characters. The focaliser is the reflector of the story, who takes a view point, or an angle of telling the story. The omniscient narrator is thus known as the zero focaliser because his perspective is all knowing.
3. The narrator's stance can be of different types: the homodiegetic narrator (first person) is part of the narrated story world, while the heterodiegetic narrator is not part of the narrated story world. The former represents the story and is a restricted narrator, and the latter stipulates the story and is the all-knowing narrator. However, the autodiegetic narrator is inside the story and also the main character of the story.
4. The word packaging of a story, meaning organising the different components of a story. The frame narrative is the primary element; and within it is embedded the secondary elements.
5. The aspect of time, which is non-chronological (anachrony) in nature, has two structures according to Genette. One is analepsis which is the flash back used to recollect memories of past, the other is prolepsis, which is the flash forward or speculation of a future event.
6. Time can be of four types:
 - Subsequent: tells about past
 - Prior- tells about future; prophesy, dream
 - Simultaneous: tells about present
 - Interpolated: subsequent and simultaneous together; past and present blended together.
7. There are four levels of speech to understand the distance between the narrator and the story:
 - Narratized: here the character's words and actions are integrated into the narration, provided they are treated like any other event.
 - Transposed, indirect style: here the character's words are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation.

- Transposed speech, free indirect style: the narrator reports the character's words or actions, without using a subordinating conjunction.
 - Reported speech: The narrator quotes the character's exact words.
8. There are multiple functions of the narrator: communication function (addresses the narratee directly), testimonial function (affirms truth), directing function (Narrator comments on the organization of the text), narrative function (the basic function to narrate the story), ideological function (narrator introduces instructive comments on his own narrative).
9. Frequency of the story, or any event in a story has the following types:
- Simulative: narrating once what happened once
 - Repeating: narrating more than once what happened once
 - Iterative: narrating once when it happened several times
10. The speed of a story can be of four types:
- Pause: static description of the events
 - Scene: narrative time equals story time
 - Summary: story time is more than narrative time
 - Ellipses: narrative describes nothing about some part of the story

LET US STOP AND THINK



From Work to Text by Roland Barthes marks the transition from structuralism to post-structuralism. It is emphasised in the essay that when a 'work' enters the methodological field, that is, it is considered to be interpreted in a new light or to be 'decentered', it becomes a text. In this way work becomes the imaginary tail of a text. In this context it is important to study the difference one derives in the pleasure of reading a 'work' and a 'text'.

8.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have understood the spread of structuralism in various disciplines and mediums of human communication. From structural linguistics

to culture, from storytelling to folklore, we find that there are visible structures everywhere. A formalist interpretation of a text or any other forms of communication enables us to see these patterns as sign processes. This unit clarifies the application of structuralism as a theory, in varied objects of study. The way of meaning making has been dissected over the time by people from around the world. The ones discussed in this unit have contributed to explain the system of signs in culture, relationships, language and mostly in communication.



8.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss sign, signifier, signified.
2. What is langue and parole?
3. What is Diachronic and Synchronic language?
4. What is the difference between savage and civilized?
5. What is narratology?
6. What are the thirty one functions according to Propp?
7. What are the seven major characters in the frame of any story?
8. What is the difference between work and text?
9. What are the functions of the narrator according to Genette?
10. What is the difference between mimesis/mimetic and diegesis?
11. What is zero focalisation?
12. What the types of frequency in a story?



8.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 9: POST-STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION: KEY IDEAS AND APPLICATIONS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 9.0 Introduction: Post-structuralism
- 9.1 Learning Objectives
- 9.2 Deconstruction
- 9.3 Key ideas of Derrida
- 9.4 Key ideas of Foucault
- 9.5 Key ideas of Paul de Man
- 9.6 Key ideas of Harold Bloom
- 9.7 Summing Up
- 9.8 Assessment Questions
- 9.9 References and Recommended Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION: POST-STRUCTURALISM

The perspective of Structuralism was shaken by the emergence of post-structuralism in the 1970s. Jacques Derrida's paper on "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" delivered in 1966 to an International Colloquium at John Hopkins University, challenged the strictness of structures which regulated the entire field of culture, anthropology and linguistics under Saussure and Claude Levi Strauss. Derrida began by attacking the Western idea of "logocentric" language, championed by religious factors that acknowledged the words of God to be the ultimate truth. Derrida posits that the centre is always absent. He shook the foundation of structures with the help of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes by questioning the authenticity of 'truth'. They are the anti-foundationalist theorists, who were sceptical about the unquestionable traditional meanings of truth, centre, knowledge, or even history. The word "post" in structuralism does not limit itself in meaning that it is after

structuralism, but it is more of a development which tried to replace structuralist constructs.

The primary aim of post-structuralism was to decentre the subjects. The critical perspectives of Saussure and other structuralists on ‘centre’ and the marginal or other types of binary were subverted by questioning the concept of sign, signified and signifier. Derrida posits that signification is not an easy process. It involves delay of meanings. For instance: Is that a cat? There cannot be a direct meaning. It is so because before we reach the actual answer, we have to strike out many wrong answers; like that is not a car, not a house, not a phone and infinite such objects. So the answer to the question “is that a cat” is delayed, and the signifier does not reach the signified in a linear fashion. There is a freeplay of meanings in post-structuralism. The control of the language as a system of strictly relational element is attacked by this new theory.

Also, the truth of the author is questioned by post-structuralism. The author is considered to be “dead”. This “dead” is not the physical death of the author himself, but the death of his authority over signification. In Foucault’s essay “What is an author?” and Barthes’ “The Death of the Author”, this decentring of the truth told by the author is theoretically argued. With the suspicion towards the author’s truth, what we have in the forefront is the role played by the reader and the interpreter. This results in the possibility of endless meanings. A text in the hands of the readers becomes a chain of signifiers. The intertextuality of the text also encourages the reader-response criticism.

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be introduced to the rise of post-structuralism across different disciplines. The process of attributing meaning to words changes in this theory. Unlike structuralism, the core is no longer the structures put together, but the arbitrariness of them. To this end the unit will:

- familiarize you with the impact of post-structuralism in different areas of knowledge

- enable you to understand the works of the proponents
- acquaint you with new terms which explain the core of post-structuralism
- understand the key ideas of Derrida, Foucault, Paul de Man and Harold Bloom

9.2 DECONSTRUCTION

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the word *destruktion* and says that the purpose of *destruktion* is to “arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since”. The etymology of the word deconstruction has been related to Heidegger’s term over the years. Deconstruction is different from *destruktion*; on the point that it is an endless process. This is mostly because a permanent meaning of any object is impossible. Deconstruction talks about the relationship between the text and meaning. The propagators of this theory are: Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Barbara Johnson, J. Hillis Miller and Jonathan Culler.

In 1967, Derrida offered this definition: “To ‘deconstruct’ philosophy, thus, would be to think—in the most faithful, interior way—the structured genealogy of philosophy’s concepts, but at the same time to determine—from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy—what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this ... motivated repression”.

The main points of this theory are:

- It opposes the binary system of meaning-making. For instance: absence-presence, centre-margin.
- The absence of the transcendental signifier extends the play of signification.
- There is no inside and outside in a text.
- A text deconstructs itself, by challenging its own grounds and dispersing itself into incoherent meanings.

9.3 KEY IDEAS OF DERRIDA

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), born into a Jewish family in Algiers is a French Philosopher, known as a stalwart of deconstruction and semiotics. His major works are: "Speech and Phenomena" and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs (1973), *Of Grammatology* (1976) *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Dissemination* (1981), *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994), *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), etc.

Some of Derrida's key concepts are as follows:

- He shook the idea of the centre. This centre is basically the core of any emotional, physical, moral feeling and it never interrogated; like the position of god, or the authority of the language of god and scriptures. Wherever we go we are controlled by the idea of the centrality. In reality we see that the centre is non-existing. The centre is elsewhere and not in the middle. At the heart of structuralism is this idea of centre, as structures, models, archetypes. Derrida challenges the structures as the centre and tells that the centre is elsewhere.
- The centre or the cause prima (the origin of everything), is generated from the idea of logocentrism, the world of god. In the beginning of the world, this logocentric language dominated every religion or culture. The deconstruction theory questions this dominance, this socialization of seeing the centre, the foundational pattern. Derrida is of the opinion that we need to investigate the marginal as well, and transcend beyond the centre. It is the marginal which has an alternative history of every possible event. It should be taken into account as well.
- Another concept is the idea/metaphysics of presence and absence. Art creates a complex reality. Instead of presenting reality in an outright fashion, it puts reality into question. In literature nothing is absolutely present or absent.

- **Differance:** It is a portmanteau word of differ and defer. Saussure says that meaning is produced only when the utterance is completed. But Derrida poses that signification is always in difference. The signifier points to a signified that again becomes a signifier for a new signified. In other words a word is spilt into many meanings and in the process of signification a reader is caught in a web of signifiers. This delays the process of deriving meaning of words and aids in the process of deconstructing the text.
- **The conflict of the outside and the inside,** even in a text is important. We are caught between the original and the supplementary. We cannot decide on it. In any literary text, interpretation, meaning, we are confused between which is primary and which is secondary. There is no clear answer. Derrida uses the word “parergon” to imply a ‘supplement’ used for a lack (absence of a presence) in a system, that drives the motive for deconstructing a text. He calls it “Neither work (ergon) nor outside the work (hors d’oeuvre), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work.”
- **Traces:** It means "track", "path", or "mark". He defines it as "mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present". As opposed to the Socratic or Saussurean speech, he uses trace as half buried reminders of figures, images, words, expressions. The word trace is adapted from Levinas and Heidegger.
- **In order to re-establish the relation between speech and writing,** Derrida uses the term "arche-writing". He shakes the hierarchy of speech and writing which has been continuing since centuries. In the ancient Platonic world, speech had been always given priority over writing. Arch which means origin, principle, or telos, goes beyond the conflict of speech and writing, and talks about a kind of writing that precedes both speech and writing.
- **He used the term “pharmakon”,** which meant both "cure" and "poison", in the Greek world of medicine, to compare writing to pharmakon. He rejects Plato’s negation of writing as a poisonous art. In the process of writing, we

deliberately exclude and include; it is both a remedy and a poison at the same time.

9.4 KEY IDEAS OF FOUCAULT

Paul-Michel Foucault (15 October 1926 – 25 June 1984), generally known as Michel Foucault, was a French philosopher, interested in the idea of the philosophical and historical texts. This social theorist and literary critic tells us that instead of looking at periods, ages, historical markers, we should be looking at “episteme”, the cultural, linguistic, moral knowledge system. In his works, namely, *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1954), *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *Death and the Labyrinth* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *This is Not a Pipe* (1968), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *The History of Sexuality* (1976–2018), he discussed the overlapping system of knowledge adaptation and rejection. According to him, in the formation of knowledge, exclusion plays a major role. Exclusion is the weapon to neutralize rebels. There is a power play in the process of knowledge and history making. History is not about documenting or gathering information, it is more about gathering information about the way information is gathered. His major ideas were:

- There is a lot of overlapping in historical narratives. These overlapping are not visible in the “grand narrative”, the tale which we consider as ultimate truth. But it is required to question the layers. Foucault promotes the questioning of grand narratives framed by established institutions like the state, government, military, hospital, church or social systems.
- History is more of a construction than a reality. It is a bias which gives a particular narrative historical apparatus. For example, in case of history textbooks, sometimes they miss out the entire history of untouchability and slavery. These history books are biased and constructed. They do not project the ultimate truths. It is the “epistemes” which gives us the little information, the knowledge which is real-history.

- Panopticon: Foucault's panopticon is a mode of surveillance, regulation and power politics, played by an institution. It is the one who surveys and keeps record of every movement. People get "watched" and their thoughts and ideologies are moulded by this device. In common parlance we can associate it with the CCTV camera, which keeps watch for signs of conspiracy, crime, unlawful acts. But this device is mostly misused by the state. The records of hospital, government, or any survey enables the state to formulate policies to limit the freedom of the individual. Foucault borrows this idea from Jeremy Bentham in his book *Discipline and Punish*. Bentham talks about an architectural design, an examining gaze, or the panoptic eye which can rotate and have a 360-degree visibility in the prison cells. Foucault shifted the idea of Bentham's panopticon which is applicable in a dungeon for vigilance and applied it to the political and historical world, and the making of truths and knowledge. In short, social contract or discipline is achieved in a state by power politics. The idea of panopticon can be applied to historians as well, who observe and objectifies. But is objectivity possible? Can we trust the historians blindly?
- Foucault encourages to look at the totality of the world, at the contradictory impulses in any discourse (a group of statements that constructs a language to discuss any historical event; ways of talking by considering power politics, social practices and forms of subjectivity; history, social practice and text used together). Discourse carries evidence of the will to power and the will to truth; both being two opposing impulses. There is always an existing counter-discourse, which is a system within the government which resists explanation to citizens.
- Gaze: Generally speaking, gaze means stare, to look fixedly. In the terminology of Foucault, it is a social implication of panopticon. Gaze is a social device, not an optical phenomenon. It is used to bring discipline or control. It has its negative implications. The term is introduced by Foucault in his 1963 book *The Birth of the Clinic*. Foucault uses the word to explain that it is not just the object of knowledge which is constructed but

also the knower. Gaze deals with the hierarchical relations between the doctor-patient, government-citizens, etc.

- Another important text is the *History of Sexuality*, a four-volume study of sexuality in the western world, especially during Renaissance and the Victorian era. He argues that during this age, the concept of sexuality was not suppressed at all. He provides an anti-thetical statement to the “repressed hypothesis”, saying that sexuality in fact proliferated through confessions in church in the modes of writing, which incorporated the sexuality of children, the criminal, the mentally ill, and the homosexual. In the book we have a discussion on the body, uses of pleasure, social principles and the evolution of sexuality. Pleasure is sexualized and embodied in this text.

9.5 KEY IDEAS OF PAUL DE MAN

Literary critic Paul de Man (December 6, 1919 – December 21, 1983), also known as Paul Adolph Michel Deman, was born in Belgium. His famous works are *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (1979), *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1983), *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984) and *The Resistance to Theory* (1986). He is mostly known in the field of deconstruction for his rhetorical language and figurative way of understanding the world.

His main ideas are:

- Tropes are necessary in a language to shake its logic, its referential usage. Figurative language and rhetoric create a tension in the straightforward use of sign and significations.
- Every interpretation that we make is not a continuation but a displacement. Every reading creates strain and sustains allegory
- De Man breaks the linearity between text and interpretation. He allows disruption and moments of slip in a language.
- Every act of writing/telling is an act of death of the story. Authenticity/authority does not work. Every story has germs of its own deconstruction. A text can be self-destructing.

- He focuses on the idea of de-facement. In literature like autobiography, life writing, confessions, there is a lot of masking. The authority is unreliable. This conflict of experience and telling makes a text layered.
- Aporia is another concept, which establishes the expression of doubt in the categorisation of a text or its interpretation. For example, it raises questions on the acceptability of a statement whether it is comic or serious, factual or interpreted. Every text has a truth which is also the moment of indecisiveness. Aporia is a paradox, which is a resistance to any unified interpretation of a text. A text dismantles itself through its points of hesitation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is discourse?

2. What are grand narratives?

3. What is aporia?

4. What is the meaning of the “death” of the author?

5. Point out the differences between structuralism and post-structuralism.

9.6 KEY IDEAS OF HAROLD BLOOM (1930--)

This American literary critic and Yale university professor is credited with the writings of *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1980), etc. He was Jewish priest by profession. Apart from his corpus of work in varied areas, his major contribution to deconstruction was about the anxiety faced by the aspiring/ new poet because of the overarching legacy or history of his successors. This tradition, which is guided by the ancestors of an art, is treated with suspicion by Bloom. He remaps history of poetic influence. He throws light on this figurative war between the two generations. The strong poet (the old/dead poet) is at war with the ephebe, his disciple or the new/child poet. The former often hinders the creative process of the latter. He discusses the transformation of poetry and the swerving poetry takes in the hands of great poets; like Milton (who rewrites Homeric epics by reconstituting centre of epic tradition), Wordsworth (who introduces the subjective poet, the romantic “I”), Wallace Stevens (who treats sublime), Pope (who tackles the mock heroic, the lowly in the society). He also

discusses poets like Robert Browning, Edmund Spenser, Walt Whitman, John Ashbery.

In the *Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*, he introduces a way out of this anxiety faced by the new poet. Despite the pressure of influence, any original work can be produced by the use of six revisionary ratios. They are:

- Clinamen: Bloom defines this as “poetic misreading or misprision proper”. This concept is borrowed from Lucretius. Here the powerful figure/the new poet changes his course of direction from the precursor, assuming that the precursor moved to a point with accuracy but should have swerved from the way the new poet shall do now.
- Tessera – Bloom defines this as “completion and antithesis”. This resembled the art of mosaic making. Here the new poet completes the work of the old poet, but in the process destroys and changes it. This is done through parody and intertextuality. For example, Pope’s handling of Shakespearean plays.
- Kenosis – Bloom defines this as a “breaking device similar to the defence mechanisms our psyches employ against repetition compulsions”, in other words "a movement toward discontinuity with the precursor". Bloom takes this idea from St. Paul who took Christianity out of the origin and adapted Judaic rituals in Christianity, seeing them as repeated but different. Similar breaks have been taken in the Romantic poetry as well. Dante’s ‘hell’ has been given a newer look by Wordsworth in his sublime effect of nature.
- Daemonization – Bloom defines this as a “movement towards a personalized Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor’s Sublime”. This came from the Neoplatonic usage, which suggests being aided by an intermediary, who is neither divine nor human. The powers in the precursor poem derive from something beyond it. The poet does so "to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work".
- Askesis – Bloom defines this as a “movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude”. The new author cleanses himself of the influence of the dead poets and desires a new expression which is his own individuality.

- Apophrades – Bloom defines this as the “return of the dead”. The new poet uses the power of the dead poet to speak on their behalf. Pound uses this process by invoking dead poets in a collective manner in his “A Pact” poem (where Walt Whitman is the dead returning in the poem in order to strengthen the voice of the new poet). This concept has Athenian origin and it creates an uncanny effect.

LET US STOP AND THINK



Post-structuralists critics aim to highlight discontinuity in a text by invoking a deconstructive reading of it. These deconstructive practises in the texts have been often termed as ‘textual harrassment’ (Barry 69). Texts such as *The Construction of Social Reality* by John Searle and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* by Jurgen Habermas call attention to the fact that the insights of Derrida on deconstruction were subject to harsh criticism.

9.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have learnt about the difference between structuralism and post-structuralism and how they were developing two different approaches of interpreting or understanding knowledge. The systematic data collection and analysis of structuralism was attacked by the sceptical nature of its contender post-structuralism. The overarching linguistic medium of the former was attacked by the latter saying that language itself is a threat. Post-structuralism focuses on fluidity and subjectivity of structures.



9.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss deconstruction.
2. What are the six revisionary ratios? Discuss.
3. Discuss Paul De Man’s ideas of deconstruction.
4. How did Derrida challenge the idea of centre?

5. Give a critical analysis of the “death of the author”
6. Name the proponents of deconstruction.
7. Critically examine structuralism and post-structuralism.



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UNIT 10: NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL MATERIALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.0 Learning Objectives

10.1 Introduction: New Historicism

10.2 Cultural Materialism

10.3 Key ideas of New Historicism

10.4 Ideas of Stephen Greenblatt and other New Historicists

10.5 Summing Up

10.6 Assessment Questions

10.7 References and Recommended Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION: NEW HISTORICISM

The ground of new historicism is established by the works of three theorists: Michel Foucault, Clifford Geertz, and Raymond Williams. New Historicism is a literary critical movement, which first developed in the 1980s. First, what is historicism? It is the theory that social and cultural phenomena are determined by history or the tendency to regard historical development as the most basic aspect of human existence. The old type of historicism dealt with the study of history which sees history as a background and context of a story. It hailed that history is stable and objective in nature; literature reflects history, which is considered to be the ultimate truth. With the coming of post-structuralism, the historical truths were being questioned. New historicism sees history as biased, a power-play of a powerful writer, subjective in nature. History is mainly interpretative. Unlike New Criticism this movement of the 1980s did not see art for the sake of art, or a text in isolation, focussing only on its literary value. It gave importance to the historical context. The conditions of the production, meaning, effect, circulation and evaluation of history is situated as

an important part of the existence of the text. The culture of the specific time and place when the text came into being is conceived by the new historicists. In general terms, it means to read the text parallel to the history and socio-cultural events which sustained the text.

Harold Aram Veesser, in his collection of essays, “The New Historicism” (1989), pointed out some key points of new historicism. They are as follows:

- that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
- that every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
- that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably;
- that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths, nor expresses inalterable human nature;
- ... that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

To be precise, new historicism focussed on the fragmentary views of an event, instead of the universal truths.

John Brannigan defines “New historicism is a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds. As a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible.”, in his book *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*.

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall be introduced to a new way of approaching literary texts or culture itself. To the end of this unit we shall:

- be acquainted with what is new historicism and how is it related to cultural materialism
- unable to learn a new way to approach historical facts

- differentiate between old and new historicism
- be familiar with the works of new historicists like Harold Aram Veesser, Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher, Michel Foucault, Clifford Geertz, and Raymond Williams.

10.2 CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Raymond Williams, in 1980s theorized the idea of cultural materialism, on the basis of Marxist theory of power structure, Frankfurt scholar Antonio Gramsci and Marvin Harris's 1968 book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. He focuses on how culture or a product of culture is inherently bound to a system of oppression and hegemony. Culture plays a major role in framing ideas, assumptions and social relations within its fabric. Williams viewed culture as a productive process, a means of production. As a theory, cultural materialism analyses historical facts to study how a powerful class appropriates history by bending, erasing portions of it. Cultural materialists studied the contemporary power politics while the new historicists studied the past societies and their integral power systems. Interestingly, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, authors of the book named *Political Shakespeare* identified four key points of this theory: historical context, close textual analysis, political commitment, theoretical method. This theory encourages to investigate the history again, this time with the end of looking at how a powerful political group or social class subverts the representation of the marginalized, poor communities. Power relations become the most important context. This theory to a large extent stands parallel to the ideas of New Historicism. Therefore, it is noteworthy.

Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton, in the introduction to the book *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, remarks that cultural materialists are not the 'the British wing' of new historicism, as some critics might view them to be.

10.3 KEY IDEAS OF NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism borrowed from the Marxist thinker Louis Althusser, according to whom, "Ideology exists in institutions and the practices specific to

them. We are even tempted to say, more precisely: ideology exists in apparatuses and the practices specific to them.” The manifestation of ideology through the institutions of an era is directly related the literature an era produces. The ideology is reflected in the language of the time. His essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” throws light in this direction. Apart from this, Michel Foucault’s idea of discourse implies that in a state which has the panopticon/surveillance device, the hegemony of the powerful side determines the formation of the historical narrative. New Historicism borrowed from the dialogic criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin, which sees the text as an intertextual piece with diverse voices clashing together in the form of a dialogue. These voices belong to people from multiple classes and segments of the society. Bakhtin interpreted this side of our understanding of “truth” in the works of Dostoevsky (propounded in Bakhtin’s book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*). Bakhtin tells us that there are multiple truths in a polyphonic text. Such text has the scope of dialogue within its frame, rather than the monopoly of the author in deciding the singular meaning of the plot.

LET US STOP AND THINK



- Heteroglossia: It talks about the varieties of a single language that exists in a text. These varieties throw light at the details of the characters, their occupation, their class, etc. Bakhtin calls it: another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. The coexistence of the speech of the characters, speech of the narrator, speech of the author and the possible speech of the reader together makes a novel potential enough to sustain hybridity. This concept was laid by Bakhtin in his paper: "Discourse in the Novel."
- Terms commonly used in New Historicism are: context, hegemony, power, truth

In the ethnographic study of the anthropologist Clifford Greetz, namely *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), he specified the distinction between the “thick” and “thin” description while understanding any historical or cultural truth. This concept immensely influenced the New Historicists. Before Greetz, the concept was introduced by the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle in the year 1949, in his work "The Thinking of Thoughts: What is 'Le Penseur' Doing?" and "Thinking and Reflecting". Greetz took from Ryle the distinction between two words “blink” and “wink”. The blink is mostly an involuntary twitch, a contraction of the eyelid, so it is a thin description, because it states something very directly. The wink is again a sign of conspiracy. It can mean varied things when it is delivered to the addressee. The layered meanings of a wink make it a thick description. The wink is delivered to a particular person, it means a particular message, it is deliberate in nature, and it has social code as well. A thin description does not call for interpretation because it has less context and requires less explanation; a thick description relies on interpretation. In literary criticism, or in new historicism, this idea becomes handy because it urges us to go for the thick description. This requires knowledge of cultural context and the layers of meanings. Reading a text, means to excavate these meanings, the cultural codes, networks of social conventions, multiple truths, etc.

10.4 IDEAS OF STEPHEN GREENBLATT AND OTHER NEW HISTORICISTS

Some of the major works of Stephen Greenblatt are: *Three modern satirists: Waugh, Orwell, and Huxley*; *Sir Walter Raleigh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles*; *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*; *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*; *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*; *Hamlet in Purgatory*.

Greenblatt is a scholar of Renaissance studies and Shakespeare studies; and the co-founder of the journal named *Representations*, which forwarded the ideas of this critical theory. In his 1982 introduction to *The Power of Forms in*

the English Renaissance, he introduced the term new historicism. Later, he redefined new historicism under the name of “cultural poetics”. He states that history influences any literary text. The events of the era, heterogeneous facts and opinions, power politics are no longer the background of literature. Neither history nor a literary text can afford to be homogenous. The heterogeneity is in fact embedded, or in other words, literary texts are embedded in its contexts. The literary text is one amongst the religious, scientific, social, legal texts. Moreover, the literary text is considered to be a vehicle for power.

In Greenblatt’s work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), he defines the self as a construction; identity as a desired self-representation and power relation. In his analysis of Shakespeare, he remarks in “*King Lear* and Harsnett's 'Double-Fiction’” that Shakespeare's self-consciousness is dependent on the institutions and the symbols of power it anatomizes. This shows that the idea of new historicism contradicts the ideas of new criticism. Where new criticism forwards the intentional and affective fallacy, new historicism brings the history of the text in the highlight saying that we cannot part with it by any means because it is rooted in the text.

The shift of Greenblat from the label of new historicism to the label of “cultural poetics” is defined by Richard Strier, in his book *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism and Renaissance Texts* as follows: “New Historicism seems to me best as a certain kind of critical praxis, a praxis which does not need to be theorized to be effective, and that does not need to indulge in polemics of any kind. One of the reasons Greenblatt prefers 'cultural poetics' to 'new historicism' is that it is not only wittier, more obscure, and more descriptive than the latter but also less polemical. The profession, however, has fixed on 'New Historicism' as the name of the 'movement' with which Greenblatt is associated because in the current atmosphere polemics are strongly encouraged.”

Also, Louis Montrose is an American literary theorist who contributed to New Historicism through his work, *Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture*. He is known for his phrase, which describes the base of new historicism as “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality

of history”. Like a literary text, history also tends to be a text. Montrose is of the opinion that history is mere “representations”. This contradicts the way of perceiving history as something objective. History is a cultural construct. It is based on the biases or prejudices of the history maker, the historians. The historicity of the text refers to cultural specificity, social embedment of modes of writing. Or in other words the text is rooted in culture, social codes, events of an era. While the textuality of history refers to the constructedness of history, the fact that history is made up like any novel, it cannot be the ultimate truth because it is based on someone’s subjective understanding. Historians have the power to eliminate portions of history. History is a text where portions are selected and rejected based on specific ideology. History cannot have a grand narrative, a single big truth. It is based on little narratives. This concept draws a parallel between literary text and history.

The use of the concept of new historicism is in the following areas:

- the interpretation of literary text in relation to history
- ideological, political inclinations of a society
- enquiry of truth and falsity
- interdisciplinary analysis- linguistic, economic, cultural, political
- perception of plurality
- to understand the marginalised characters, institutions, social groups

Another influential New Historicist is Jonathan Dollimore, who inquired inside the history of gender, queer studies, Renaissance, to find the entry points where history has been fabricated and manipulated by powerful institutions or the points where art and writers have questioned the authoritative narrative of an era, or institutions like the state or the church. His major works are: *Sexual Dissidence, Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (with Alan Sinfield).

The American historicist, Catherine Gallagher, mostly known for her works: *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, *Practicing New Historicism* (with Stephen Greenblatt), has paid attention to details of the history of the neglected figures, human bodies, nature of representations, ideology and documentation. She indulges in the enquiry of renaissance and nineteenth-century subjects, like her contemporary new historicists.

The New Historicism as a critical theory has been challenged by the view that it has continuously ignored the existence of post-modernism, which also talks about the manipulation of truthful knowledge. It is also critiqued because somewhere, many critics feel that by bringing history or politics to the fore it has reduced the importance of literary texts.

10.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have read a new approach to studying history and the process of history making. Also, we have tried to see that literary criticism is interdisciplinary in nature. New Historicism, again and again, connects itself with culture, power, history, text, etc. This is evident in the works of its proponents. Also, cultural materialism is a parallel development to new historicism. However, there is a slight difference in their approach. While new historicist focused more on the socio-political connections of a literary texts, cultural materialism had the practical world of culture, society and power dynamics to interpret.

10.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. How is new historicism different from old historicism?
2. What were the other theories which influenced new historicism?
3. What is heteroglossia?
4. What is the difference between thick and thin description?

5. Explain the phrase: historicity of texts and the textuality of history.
6. What is cultural materialism? How is it different from new historicism?
7. Who are the major proponents of New Historicism?

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MODULE IV: SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY AND CRITICISM

UNIT 11: SOCIETY AND LITERATURE AND SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Learning Objectives
- 11.2 Society and Literature and Sociology of Literature
- 11.3 Hippolyte Taine and the Rise of Literary Historicism
- 11.4 Summing Up
- 11.5 Assessment Questions
- 11.6 References and Recommended Reading

11.0 INTRODUCTION

Literature, like sociology, deals with the same social, political and economic issues. Society is the common ground for both the disciplines. Sociology is the scientific study of man, the study of social institutions and of social processes. Likewise, literature is also considered as a faithful mirror of society.

A literary work is viewed as a truthful representation of the existing social order. Among the different critical approaches to literature, sociological approach to literature is a significant one which seeks to address the social, historical and political implications of literary texts.

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to make you

- understand how sociology and literature address the social world.
- know about sociology of literature
- learn about Hippolyte Taine and the Rise of Literary Historicism

11.2 SOCIETY AND LITERATURE AND SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

Sociology is the scientific investigation of human society. It systematically examines the functions of human society, various patterns of social relationships, the functions of social and political organizations, the dynamics of social interaction and the manifold elements of culture. The structure of a given society can be known through the systematic analysis of its political, religious, academic and social institutions. It also examines the influences of these institutions on human life. In *The Sociology of Literature* (1972) Alan Swingewood comments: “Sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society, the study of social institutions and of social processes; it seeks to answer the question how society is possible, how it works, why it persists”(11).

Literature is viewed as a mirror of an age. It is considered as an expression of society. It reflects various facets of social structure, social institutions, family relationships, socio-economic situations, political issues and so on. Literature is also viewed as a powerful tool to bring about socio-economic changes. Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship between literature and society.

Sociology of literature generally deals with the correlation between sociology and literature. Like sociology, literature also deals with the social world. As a major literary genre, the novel is often viewed as a faithful mirror of society. It can be seen as a truthful representation of the existing social order—the conflicts between different social classes, man’s relation with family, and other social, political, economic and academic institutions. The changes in the social institutions bring changes to the form and content of literature. Likewise, literary works may bring changes in the existing social order through the ideas and views inherent in them. Society provides raw material to the writers and the writers produce literature on the basis of those available materials. But literature is not a ‘passive’ expression of society. The intention and creativity of the writer play an important role in the depiction of existing social order in different ways.

So, literature is more than a mere documentation of social happenings. It offers a critique of social and human conditions. Some writers introduce such heroes who remain alienated and revolt against the existing social order. It is not justifiable to consider literature merely as record of social and political happenings of a particular period. Literature not only represents but also reacts to and acts upon the social reality. Alan Swingewood states: “In the purely documentary sense, one can see the novel as dealing with much of the same social, economic and political textures as sociology. But, of course, it achieves more than this; as art, literature transcends mere description and objective scientific analysis, penetrating the surfaces of social life, showing the ways in which men and women experience society as feeling” (12-13).

Some literary critics argue that literature should be judged on the basis of its intrinsic qualities—structure, plot construction, symbols, imagery and so on. For them, the impact of the external world should not be a prime concern in interpreting literature. Among them, the New Critics explicitly rejected sociological and historical approaches to literature. They were not at all concerned with matters outside the text itself---the life of the author, the socio-political history of the period, the social and historical implications of the literary work and so on. They supported an autonomous and autotelic concept of a literary text and argued that the meaning of the literary text was located within the boundaries of the text itself. “New Critics insisted that you could not use a literary text as if it were historical evidence. This was because such a literalist approach ignored the text’s specific dynamics, its tropes and use of figurative language” (Matterson 172). New Criticism viewed literary language as special, doing more than simply providing straightforward sociological and historical information. The New Critics favoured close reading of the text and its dynamics, rather than exploring something beyond its boundaries. Thus, New Criticism valued the texture of literary language and rejected the social and historical locations of the texts.

On the contrary, a literary work may also be viewed as a social document that helps one to understand the social world. For example, *The Canterbury Tales*

is an insightful picture of fourteenth century English life. There Chaucer realistically presents the variegated life of his age. For instance, in the “Clerk’s Tale” and “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” there are references to the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381. Similarly, Chaucer’s portrayal of the ‘Doctor of Physic’ is representative of the theory and practice of medicine in 14th century England. Here the physician is also something of an astrologer because in those days the physical ailments were supposed to be related to the positions of stars and planets. In the poem *The Chimney Sweeper*, William Blake portrays the deplorable living conditions of the chimney sweepers during the Industrial Revolution in England in the 18th century. Blake exposed the tragedies of those children who were forced to work in factories in order to support the growing need for labour in the demanding economy. Likewise, Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) is a realistic portrayal of social and political scenario of India when the Gandhian movement was at its peak. The novel depicts the mirror images of contemporary Indian society with its cultural, religious, economic and educational aspects. Therefore, it cannot be denied that literature, to a great extent, is a reflection of society. By offering critical analyses of political, religious, academic and social institutions, a literary work also contributes to the growth of society. In the words of Charles I Glicksberg:

Every novel, every play, however experimental or avant garde its technique, makes a contribution to society, even though the segment of the reading population or the theatre going audience that responds to it is small. Even if it is presented as a fable, a fantasy, a madman’s confession, an allegory, a junkie’s autobiography, it has definite social implications. (2)

Both the author and the literary product are part of the social system. So, without the sociological approach, a complete understanding of literature is not possible.

11.3 HIPPOLYTE TAINÉ AND THE RISE OF LITERARY HISTORICISM

Social criticism is similar to historical criticism in recognizing a literary text as a reflection of the society. French critic and historian Hippolyte Adolphe Taine is one of the first practitioners of literary historicism as a critical method. He is particularly remembered for his approach to the contextual study of a work of art. Taine argues that the goal of criticism is biographical, that is, to uncover the toiling, living man behind the work. For Taine, a work of literature is a transcript of contemporary manners, a representation of a certain kind of mind. By the word 'man' Taine doesn't mean the individual author, but the author as a representative of his race and epoch. The author is the man entrenched in the customs of his age. Literature is the product of the author's environment. For a perfect understanding of the work of literature, the environment- surrounding of the author has to be analysed. Taine's critical approach is mainly based on the aspects of what he called "race, milieu and moment." Here, the word 'race' refers to the hereditary cultural dispositions that govern people without their knowledge. Taine argues that there is an underlying racial characteristic of a particular group, in spite of natural varieties among its members. The word 'milieu' signifies the particular circumstances, the physical and social environment in which one lives. The disposition of a particular person is affected as he is forced to accommodate himself to circumstances. Beside race and the given surroundings, the acquired moments act to determine human identity. It indicates how human beings are fashioned by the times in which they live. The imprint of one moment or another on the ground where the hereditary dispositions and the surrounding circumstances operate may make the total effect altogether different.

In the later period, similar notions regarding an author's function in the creation of literature were put forward by Lucien Goldmann, the Romanian-born, Paris-based sociologist of literature. Goldmann in *The Hidden God* (1964) and other works argues that the literary work is not to be understood as the expression of the author's self. He rejected the idea of literary work as the creation of individual genius. Literary works arise out of social consciousness. They are collective products of social community. Goldmann argued that these works are based upon "trans-individual mental structures". These mental structures belong

to particular classes or groups which Goldmann calls 'homologies'. Goldmann posited homology between class situation, world view and artistic form. World views are social facts which are perpetually being constructed and dissolved by social groups. A study of a literary text can yield knowledge of both class and world view. The world views are coherently and adequately expressed in major literary and philosophical texts. The great writers articulated the mental structures and interrelations of concepts and transformed them into lasting artistic works. Through the coherent expressions of world views in these works, one gets the idea of the fundamental social conditions of his/her time.

11.4 SUMMING UP

Society is the common ground for both sociology and literature. Both the disciplines share some similar objectives. Analysing a literary work from the sociological viewpoint is one of the important critical approaches to literature. As a social institution, literature portrays the existing social reality. Both the writer and the literary works are part of the social system. Against the extrinsic approach to literature, it is argued that a literary work is not simply a record of social and historical details. It continually remakes the world as much as it holds a mirror to it. Through its reflection on man's behaviour, hopes, anxieties and aspirations, the literary work stands out with a world of its own.



11.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between sociology and literature?
2. How is literature a reflection of society?
3. What is sociological approach to literature?
4. "Literature adds to reality; it does not simply describe it." Explain.



11.6 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

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UNIT 12: MARXIST THEORY AND THE CENTRALITY OF IDEOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Learning Objectives
- 12.2 Marxism
- 12.3 Key Concepts
- 12.4 Marxism and Culture
- 12.5 Rethinking Marxism
- 12.6 Bertolt Brecht and the Concept of Epic Theatre
- 12.7 New Historicism and Cultural Materialism
- 12.8 Feminist Criticism
- 12.9 Ecocriticism or Green Studies
- 12.10 Assessment Questions
- 12.11 References and Recommended Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Social criticism is concerned with the social function of a literary text. It examines a text in the economic, political and cultural context in which it is written and produced. It recognizes literature as a reflection of the dynamics of power underlying given social structures. All aspects of society and culture are deeply entrenched in power relations. Identities, sexualities, social relations, cultural artefacts and institutions like family, religion and law are conditioned by ideologies laying down particular equations of power. A literary critic has to examine the power relations implicit in a literary text to find out how literature plays an active role in constructing and transforming identity, meaning and social relations.

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- understand the key concepts in socio-cultural criticism

- acquaint yourself with the key concepts of Marxism like base and superstructure, ideology, hegemony etc.
- learn how Marxism provides the background of most cultural criticisms
- know the restructuring and remodelling of Marxism
- understand Bertolt Brecht and the concept of ‘epic theatre’
- learn concepts like New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, Feminist Criticism, Ecocriticism or Green Studies

12.2 MARXISM

One influential type of sociological criticism is Marxist criticism which emphasizes the ideological underpinnings of literature. It explores the ways in which literary texts conceal real social and economic conditions while making the reader believe that such conditions are “natural”. Marxist cultural theory originates in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century. The basic propositions of Marxism are as follows:

- Economic conditions determine social and cultural formations.
- As cultural artefacts, literary texts often conceal real social and economic conditions.
- Literature represents exploitative economic conditions as ‘natural’ through the masking of social and economic reality.
- A literary text must be understood in relation to economic, political and cultural context in which it is written and produced.
- Literature and culture are the expressions of class conflict and social relations that are structured by power.
- Marxism seeks to locate a material basis for an abstract thing like a literary text.
- Like any other consumer good, art is also a commodity.
- There is a definite link between the socio-economic conditions and the aesthetic works produced therein.
- A Marxist approach seeks to focus how art and literature seek to implement the ideology of the dominant class.

- Marxism seeks to relate the socio-political context of the literary work to the class position of the author as well as the reader.

12.3 KEY CONCEPTS

Base and Superstructure

Marxism is a materialist philosophy. It looks for scientific explanations of a world of observable facts. As a materialist, Marx argues that human consciousness is the product of the human engagement with the material world. The social and cultural aspects of life are believed to be dependent upon the economic ones. Economy is considered as the base of society. It determines the nature and character of social and cultural forms. Socio-cultural institutions such as family, religion and law constitute the superstructure. In Marxist thought, economic base influences the social superstructure. But the relation between base and superstructure is not strictly causal because the superstructure often influences and strengthens the base. Just as the base influences the superstructure, the superstructure also influences the base. So, the cultural forms and art forms cannot always be identified as simply an expression of the economic base.

Ideology

The concept of ideology is central to the understanding of Marxism. The term signifies a set of beliefs, values and ways of thinking through which human beings perceive the world they inhabit. In complex ways, an ideology is the product of the interests of a particular class. Marx and Engels discussed the different ramifications of the term ideology in their book *The German Ideology*. The reigning ideology in any given era is conceived to be the product of its economic structure and serving the interest of the ruling class. In any historical era, certain patterns of thought are framed and circulated through the entire society to justify the interests of the dominant economic and social class. These patterns of thought are disseminated through social institutions such as education, culture and religion. The oppressed classes believe this set of beliefs

and ideas to be ‘natural’ and preordained. They don’t even recognize that they are oppressed. This system of thought which naturalizes and legitimizes inequality and prevents human beings from a truer understanding of the world by distorting material reality is termed as ideology. Thus, it is a “false consciousness”. It prevents people from recognizing the true nature of their lives and maintains the position, power and economic interests of the ruling class.

All social phenomena are related to others. For Marxists, there is no separate autonomous realm of ideas or phenomena. Everything is embedded in the network of social relations. All are interconnected. Ideology encompasses the social and cultural institutions, beliefs and practices of a given historical period including religion, politics, philosophy, legal system, art and literature . Marxism locates the so-called aesthetic realms of literature and art within the contexts of economics and historical reality. These realms are linked with questions of economic conditions and power ideology of the privileged ruling class. This ideology is sustained and reproduced by imaginative productions such as art and literature. Marxist critics don’t view literary works in accordance with transhistorical artistic criteria, but as products within the economic and social matrix of the given era. Thus, Marxist cultural theory locates all forms of art within the existing social, economic and political conditions of a particular period.

The distortion of reality – the concealment of real economic conditions in any society – is what Marxist criticism calls ideology. Marx represented ideology as a ‘superstructure’ of which the existing socio-economic system is the ‘base’. The role of ideology is crucial in disguising the reality of class exploitation. It is a veil that prevents the oppressed from a proper understanding of the socio-economic reality. Fredrick Engels described ideology as ‘a false consciousness’. It is a misrecognition of the true nature of our material lives. It is a system of ideas, beliefs, values through which the capitalist mode of production justified and naturalized itself. These systems of beliefs and ideas naturalize inequality and oppression, leading the working classes to believe that the order of exploitation in society is ‘natural’ They do not recognize that they are oppressed because they absorb the beliefs, and ideas supplied through the social and cultural

practices. Thus, ideology provides an effective strategy to hide and undermine the reality of the social world. It distracts attention from the real picture of exploitation. It has the hidden function of legitimizing and reinforcing the position, power, and economic interests of the ruling class. In *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991), Marxist critic Terry Eagleton writes:

What is sometimes felt to be primarily ideological about a form of consciousness, however, is not how it comes about, or whether it is true or not, but the fact that it is functional for legitimizing an unjust social order (44).

The task of Marxist criticism is to unravel the ideologies implicit in social institutions and cultural artefacts, the latter including literary texts. Ideology is based on the sphere of appearances. It fulfils its role by reinforcing what merely appears to be 'real' or 'natural'. The task of a Marxist literary critic is to unravel the 'appearance', to unmask and restore the reality as it really is.

Hungarian Marxist philosopher and literary critic Georges Lukacs proposes that a great work of literature presents a dialectical depiction of reality. He argues that literature provides a critical understanding of the dominant tendencies and historical and social processes. The great realists reveal the contradictions of the age which are resolved through the dialectic art of realism. Literature is not just a mirroring of everyday reality. Rather, it is the knowledge of objective reality. Literature reflects the real world with all its contradictions. Realism means works that are expressive of the social forces. Lucas argues that masters of realism like Balzac and Tolstoy could portray society critically. They could present a fictional world which is a critical reflection of life with their portrayal of conflict between the characters and the social reality of the age. Thus, these writers present the reader with an image of the richness of life with utmost clarity and correctness. Mere mimesis is not enough. One has to go beyond the reflection of immediate reality to attain the knowledge of objective reality. A realist examines his own personal experiences in their conflicts with the objective historical and social forces. A realistic art reflects life in its totality and richness in which there is a unity between objective historical situation and

personal situation and attitudes. Lukacs attacked modernist experimental writers as reactionary and decadent. These works of writers deal with the subjectivities of individuals who are alienated from society. Modernist fiction failed to perceive human existence as part of historical and social situation. Thus, Lukacs recommended a critical realism as the best mode for fiction.

Hegemony

Ideological domination and reinforcement of power relations is termed hegemony. Italian Marxist philosopher and political activist and theorist Antonio Gramsci put forward this concept as ideological domination of society. Hegemony is created in the domain of superstructure. It is the domination of the weaker sections of the society by the powerful classes, not through coercion but by consent. Hegemony can work effectively when the oppressed accept their oppression. Thus, the powerful class maintain and perpetuate their exploitation and power through the consent of the oppressed. The powerful social class achieves power not by direct means, but by winning the consent of the subordinate classes so that the oppressed unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression.

Gramsci is best known for his elaboration of the concept 'hegemony'. A founder of the Italian Communist party, Gramsci was arrested in 1926 by the fascist government under its 'emergency powers' act. While in prison, and despite miserable conditions and poor health, he continued to read and write and compiled 3000 pages of notes. His *Prison Notebooks* (1971) is a remarkable contribution to Marxist theory which covers a wide range of topics, including close readings of Marx's works.

For his analysis of culture and society, Gramsci adopted certain fundamental categories: hegemony, ideology and the division between the state and civil society. Gramsci's Marxism is characterized by a questioning of economic determinism. For Gramsci, culture is not simply a mere reflection of the social and economic reality. The relationship between cultural forms and the economic base is that of reciprocity. Instead of the passive role of the reflected culture, Gramsci argues for an active dynamic condition, the humanity's

consciousness of itself, its society, its place in history. Through these social and cultural practices, human beings are capable of not only of making and remaking history but also of remaking human nature.

Gramsci argued that revolutions are not always at the level of the social and economic structure but at the level of ideologies. He questions the belief in economic determinism and the inevitability of revolution. Revolution requires a transformation of the oppressed class from a mere object of historical powers into a genuine agent in history. It involves a radical change in social and cultural practice as well as in thought and consciousness. A renewed consciousness and a spiritual emancipation of the working class is required for revolution.

“The oppressed class will not passively accept whatever ideas are thrust upon them. The dominant class must tailor its ideas to the experiences and needs of the subordinate classes.” (Edgar *et al* 88). In a class struggle, the economic reality and sensitivity to the concrete experience must be treated equally. The dominant classes maintain their position not only through coercion but by winning the consent of the dominated. They maintain their power through a nexus of material and ideological instruments. The powerful class tailors its ideas to the needs of the subordinate classes. Further, the working class comes to identify its own best interests as being one and the same as the best interests of the ruling class.

12.4 MARXISM AND CULTURE

Marxism provides the background of most cultural criticism. Cultural studies are difficult to separate entirely from the development of Marxist thought. Marxist criticism suggests that all cultural forms serve to legitimize and perpetuate the interests of the dominant class. To do so, the dominant social and economic class must convince the working classes that the present social and economic condition of the society is ‘natural’ and inevitable. To retain their power, the dominant classes must have control over cultural products which are important means to assure the working classes that the existing social condition is benevolent and beneficial to them, that they are not really oppressed. Thus,

cultural products represent the world to us. The task of Marxist criticism is to see whether the representations of the experiences and realities of the existing societies are truthful or they are twisted for the benefit of the capitalist class. Marxist criticism is attentive to the ways in which the existing social and economic realities are represented through the medium of these cultural products. It focuses on the ways through which existing realities are represented while keeping in mind, consciously or unconsciously, the vested interests of a particular dominant class. If such representations twist reality, it is the task of Marxist criticism to unmask the hidden reality. Marxist literary and cultural theory “links cultural practices to social, economic and political structures existent in that epoch and shows how aesthetics, literary works and cultural artefacts participate in the struggle for power between the classes” (Nayar 151).

Cultural products like films, novels, comic books and music are created and consumed in particular contexts. These products explain the world around us. In other words, one perceives the world through these cultural products. These cultural products function as codes for experiences and realities of the world.

The Culture Industry

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, two German theorists, coined the term ‘culture industry’ in their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). The term indicates that like other consumer goods, culture is a product of the social and economic conditions in any society. Art is produced and sold like other objects produced in an industry. Besides, the capitalist system transforms the utility gained by the consumers into a product. It converts individuals into passive consumers. Pleasure, sentiments and entertainment are commodified and provided to the unthinking masses in a standardized way. The passive consumers accept the standardized and commodified sentiments as ‘natural’.

Adorno lacks faith in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat to combat capitalism. He argues that all human beings are integrated into the capitalist society through the culture industry. The term culture industry captures the Marxist assumption that culture is product of social and economic conditions

in any society which is produced and sold like any other commodity. In a capitalist society, the advertising and mass media industries influence the very acts of choice of consumers. Thus, the consumer's judgment of the usefulness and value of commodities is constructed by the producers. In the way, the capitalist system is perpetuated by transforming a thinking individual into an unthinking consumer. Adorno argues that thinking critically about capitalism is not simple as the thinker is not autonomous or free from the socio-economic reality he/she seeks to analyse.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Jurgen Habermas analyses the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere and its structural change in the contemporary era with the rise of corporations and big business. The public sphere is an area where individuals come together and discuss matters of common interest and influence political action through their discussions. This sphere mediates between private domain (the family, the workplace) and public powerholders. Habermas's bourgeois public sphere consists of spaces in social life where individuals assemble for free and equal exchange of ideas and reasonable discourse. They gather to discuss common public affairs and to organize against the authority of the state. Habermas's study is mainly about the transformation of the public sphere from a realm of rational discussion to a realm of cultural consumption controlled by big corporations. In an earlier stage, public opinion was formed through open discussion. In the contemporary state of capitalism, public opinion is formed by big economic and governmental organizations. As a result, citizens become passive consumers of goods. The difference between public and private sphere is eroded. Powerful business corporations have come to control and manipulate the media and the state. The state begins to play a key role in the private realm of everyday life.

12.5 RETHINKING MARXISM

In the second half of the twentieth century, traditional Marxist criticism came to be viewed from new perspectives. The base/superstructure model of Marxism was questioned by Marxist critics like Louis Althusser, Terry Eagleton

and Raymond Williams. These writers made notable contribution towards rethinking Marxism.

Louis Althusser

French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's work offers a powerful critical analysis of contemporary capitalist society. Focussing on the function of ideology, Althusser suggested that art has a particular relationship with ideology.

Althusser argued that there is no simple causal link between the economic base and the superstructure. Adopting the idea of 'structural causality' from Spinoza, Althusser argued that society and culture are conceived as manifestations of an otherwise invisible force. Thus, Althusser is able to modify the simplistic base- superstructure equation in classical Marxism, which separated society into an economic base and ideological superstructure. He puts forward a new scheme for the role of economic determinacy with regard to the ideological, political, legislative and cultural structures present within capitalist society. Althusser suggests that each of the structures retains a relative autonomy within the larger network of social relations which constitutes capitalist society. This society is formed through a network of interrelated structures. These structures are relative rather than absolute, since the economic base exerts an influence over the structure as a whole. Thus, the traditional Marxist conception of society is replaced by Althusser's account of the concept of mode of production. The reality of this mode of production is not directly expressed in ideology or consciousness; rather, it is dispersed through the social formation. The relationship between the mode of production and the various social, political, ideological, legislative structures make up the social totality.

Individuals don't exist independently of the constitution of economic and social structures. They are an expression of the relations which exists within these historically determined structures. For Althusser, ideology pre-exists the individual. It interpellates the individuals as subjects of the system. It makes the subjects feel as if they are free agents and not a subject controlled by outside forces. Ideology interpellates the individual into the predetermined set of structures, making them feel as if they are independent of the social formation.

Thus, Althusser proposes a reformulation of the meaning and significance of ideology. Ideology is the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Althusser argued that ideology is circulated through particular structures in society. On the one hand, ideology is imposed by offering threats of coercive force (the police, the law courts, prisons etc.). On the other hand, ideology is also disseminated by being presented as a desirable idea through the means of Ideological State Apparatuses like the media, the education system, religion etc. Althusser rejects the concept of 'false consciousness' as an oversimplification of ideology. This oversimplification implies the possibility of a 'true consciousness' in opposition to the 'false consciousness' or the distorted representation of reality. But, Althusser shows that all consciousness is constituted by and necessarily inscribed within ideology. Ideology is our whole lived experience. It provides the framework in which people experience their relationship to the social and political reality in which they are located. They are interpellated as subjects to the system in a larger network of social relations, a network of interrelated structures (ideological, political etc.). The autonomy of the structures is seen as relative rather than absolute. Thus, Althusser's theory challenges the traditional Marxist dialectical model in which a society's base (the economic structure) determines the society's superstructure (social consciousness). The relative autonomy of the structures signals the privileged position of social practices as mechanisms for producing subjectivities and for circulating specific understanding of the social 'reality'. Thus, literature has also a productive role in ideology formation, and not merely a reflection of social reality. "Literature may be part of the superstructure, but it is not merely the passive reflection of the economic base" (Eagleton 8).

Raymond Williams

Marxist critic Raymond Williams argues that traditional Marxist notion of base is too rigid. According to Williams, economic base is a process, and not a static condition. He argues that Marxist theory didn't successfully question the bourgeois notion of culture because it confined culture and art within the

superstructure, conceiving it as a mere reflection of objective material conditions. This way of thinking about culture should be changed. Williams suggests that base and superstructure should not be treated as separate entities while privileging the former over the latter; rather, they should be treated as interactive entities which mutually influence each other. Marxist theory should focus on the entire realm of social practices—the whole way of life. The base-superstructure model should be treated as interactive rather than a hierarchical one.

Fredric Jameson

Marxist cultural critic Fredric Jameson is renowned for works like *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Prison House of Language* (1972), *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic Act* (1981), Jameson argues that narrative is central to our understanding of reality. In this work Jameson continues his investigation of the link between style and politics. Literary forms are deeply related to the concrete. Literary texts cannot be isolated for analysis, as they are connected with concrete material realities outside. They are part of a larger historical situation. Jameson takes his notion of the “political unconscious” from Freud’s concept of repression and the psychoanalytic concept of wish fulfilment to explain the unconscious social and political presuppositions of cultural texts. By repressing social and political anxieties, cultural texts simply provide a symbolic solution to the real historical and social contradictions. Cultural narratives are techniques through which social anxieties are silenced. Therefore, these narratives are political, for they repress intolerable social experiences through sophisticated literary analysis.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin is concerned with the spheres of culture, philosophy, language and literature. He is famous for the the concepts of dialogue and dialogism. Every utterance is dialogic. There is dialogue even within a single word. An utterance doesn’t come out of nothing. It is always a

response to other utterances. “Language is a social activity. Literature is itself an ideology, which reflects another ideology which reflects the social base. The language of a literary work does question authority and convention and subvert stability” (Nagarajan 229). For Bakhtin, a literary work is a site of dialogic interaction of multiple voices. It contains within it a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Bakhtin shows that the conflict between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture takes place not only between classic and popular texts, but also between the ‘dialogic’ voices which all great literary works contain.

Language is born not within the isolated human being. The speech of a person doesn’t express an autonomous individuality. The reality of language lies in the verbal interaction between two or more human beings. Words are not neutral. Each word uttered by an individual also belongs to other people. Therefore, in every utterance a person engages in dialogue with other people. This dialogue context of an utterance transgresses its boundaries.

Bakhtin argued for viewing the novel as a dialogue generic form. The multiplicity of voices present in the text disrupts the authority of the author as the determining origin of the text. The cacophony of voices and the plurality of consciousness within the text contests the, authoritative individual expression of the author.

Through his reading of the works of Francois Rabelais, Bakhtin proposed his concept of the ‘carnavalesque’. Bakhtin identifies Carnival as an alternative cultural practice with an ambivalent relationship to dominant culture. The folk tradition of carnival undermines the authority of official culture. It is a contained subversive of the closed world of the social laws. By introducing plurality of voices from diverse social levels, the literary work provides a site where alternative and temporary cultural practices engage in an ambivalent relationship with the dominant culture.

12.6 BERTOLT BRECHT AND THE CONCEPT OF EPIC THEATRE

German playwright, poet and Marxist theorist Bertolt Brecht espoused a theory of ‘epic theatre’ to replace that of dramatic theatre. He rejects the

traditional dramatic theatre that tried to produce an illusion of reality. In such a theatre the spectators identify and sympathize with the actors and their situation, which prevents their adopting a critical attitude towards the action in the play. By preventing such empathy and identification, Brecht's epic theatre aims to expose the workings of the societal processes by inducing the spectators to think critically or to reflect on the happenings in the drama. Brecht views theatre as a tool of social change. To bring such a change through theatre, the audience should criticize and oppose the ideas, social conditions and behaviour rather than accepting them passively. In this way, Brecht intends to estrange or distance the spectator. He aims to subvert the sympathy and identification of the spectators with the actors. Conventional dramatic theatre tends to reproduce dominant ideology. Epic theatre is an alternative to the bourgeois theatre that would force the spectators to think and look at the world more critically. Brecht saw his plays as providing scope to the spectators to participate in an active process for better historical understanding and insights into the working of society to effect radical social change.

12.7 NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL MATERIALISM

New historicism paid attention to the historical, social, economic contexts of a literary text. Influenced by anthropologists and philosophers of history, the new historicists began to see contexts and texts as reflection of real, material condition of social struggle. Some of the issues raised by New Historicism are as follows:

- Art doesn't occupy an autonomous aesthetic realm. Literature is not independent of the economic, political and social conditions specific to an era.
- History is not a set of stable objective facts. It is not a background to a literary text. Rather, history is also a text like other texts.
- New Historicism adopts a view of history where the past is available to us in the form of text.

- All kinds of texts – literary, religious, legal, philosophical and so on are conditioned by contexts.
- Among other texts, a literary text doesn't occupy a special status.
- New Historicism focuses on the negotiation between canonical texts and marginalized literary and non-literary works.
- Text is a site of power relations. Conflict of power, class, gender underlies the surface meaning of a literary text. Many literary texts consist of subversive forces of an era.
- New Historicism is a critical approach that looks at the historical, social and economic context of a literary text.
- New Historicists emphasize on the study of marginalized non-literary texts as documents of historical discourse, side by side with the canonical texts.
- Literature cannot be reproduced from historical contexts. New Historicism sees literary works as influencing or inspiring other works or are influenced and informed by them. All texts (literary and non-literary) are interrelated.
- Literary work cannot be viewed in isolation. It should be considered as a product of its time, place and historical circumstances.

New historicism is a method based on the simultaneous reading of literary and non-literary texts composed during the same historical period. The New Historicists see all writings as texts. The literary text has no special privilege. In New Historicism, both literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight. A literary work is not independent of the economic, social and political conditions specific to a particular period. There is no privileged work of art. Instead, a literary text is simply a text like other texts – religious, scientific, legal, philosophical and so on. It does not have a separate, independent and unique status among the texts. So, New Historicism is an approach to literature in which there is no privileging of the literary texts. A literary text is not an autonomous and self-contained object. Instead, all texts, literary and non-literary, are part of a whole discourse. In Stephen Greenblatt's words, New Historicism involves "an intensified willingness to read all the textual traces of the past with the attention

traditionally conferred only on literary texts”. In ‘Towards a Poetics of Culture’, Greenblatt highlights the fundamental assumptions of the new critical school: The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society. In order to achieve the negotiation, artists need to create a currency that is valid for a meaningful, mutually profitable exchange. It is important to emphasise that the process involves not simply appropriation but exchange, since the existence of art always implies a return, a return normally measured in pleasure and interest (12).

In the words of Louis Montrose, New Historicism is “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history”. So, history is not conceived as a set of fixed, objective facts. Instead, history is also a text like any other literary text. Therefore, history needs to be interpreted like a work of literature. All kinds of texts – religious, philosophical, legal, scientific and so on consist of ideological representations which serve to negotiate, reproduce and propagate the complex institutional and social power structures which characterize a given historical era.

New Historicism is not a return to an earlier approach to literature which had made use of historical material. The earlier kind of literary scholarship made a hierarchical separation between the literary text and intellectual history, the latter serving as a ‘background’ or setting for the former. Literature was viewed as the reflection of the cultural and material conditions characterizing a given historical period. Instead, the New Historicists conceive of history as text. They are interested in history as represented in written documents. These documents and events of the past have to be conceived not as objective facts, but as texts which contain conflicting, subversive and struggling versions of a given society. So, history is available to us in textualised form. Literary works were viewed as independent of the social, political and cultural reality of a given era. But the New Historicists conceive of a literary text as placed within the totality of discourses, the social and cultural practices “that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a

product and a producer of cultural energies and codes” (Abrams and Harpham 190).

Closely linked to New Historicism, Cultural Materialism was popularized by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. In the introductory remarks to their edited collection of essays, *Political Shakespeare*, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield designate the critical method of cultural materialism. Cultural materialism accepted the assumption of Marxist Criticism that culture and cultural artefacts cannot ‘transcend’ the economic context of society. The word ‘materialism’ in the term implies that culture cannot be treated as independent of socio-political context. Besides, culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system. A culture and its literary products are always conditioned by the materials of production. The cultural materialists are interested in the political significance of a literary text not only in its own time, but also in the later period in which it is revised and reproduced. For instance, the cultural materialists are interested not only in the relevant history in which Shakespeare’s works were produced four hundred years ago, but also the functioning of other institutions of later periods which revised Shakespeare’s works for the theatre and cinema.

Although Cultural Materialism is closely linked to New Historicism, there are certain differences between them. Firstly, the New Historicists don’t focus on effective subversion of power structures by individuals. Instead, they argue that the social and ideological power structures restrain men and women in contesting hegemony and oppression. But the cultural materialists tend to concentrate on the intervening role of the individuals in contesting the power structures.

Secondly, the New Historicists adopt the poststructuralist idea of radical scepticism about the possibility and certainty of attaining knowledge. Their acceptance of the post-structuralist notion of textualization of history, reality etc. cuts them off from effective political positions. They argue that they know the risks and dangers involved in asserting unquestionable truth. The accusation levelled by cultural materialists against the new historicists is that they abstain themselves from effective political positions.

Thirdly, the new historicists situate the literary text in the political situation and cultural system of its own time. But the cultural materialists connect the text to our times. They situate a historically distant literary text within the contemporary cultural system.

12.8 FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminist literary criticism seeks to uncover the ideology of patriarchal society in literary texts. It shows how the text naturalises the oppression of women through stereotypical representation of women as weak, docile, seductive, sentimental and so on. Feminists suggest that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity. It originates in the cultural constructions of gender difference. By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture is always identified as rational, creative, dominating, active. On the other hand, the feminine has come to be identified as emotional, docile, passive. As the French feminist Simon de Beauvoir put it, “One is not born, but rather, becomes, a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine.” Therefore, the inequalities that exist between men and women are not natural, but cultural. Social and cultural structures like religion, education and family reinforce, naturalise and perpetuate this inequality. The social and cultural mechanisms persuade and convince the woman that she is destined to be inferior. Therefore, these cultural mechanisms are ideological. Feminists seek to uncover the ideologies implicit in the social and cultural realms of a society. Feminist literary critic aims to study the ways in which cultural artefacts like literary texts reinforce and naturalise the economic, social and political subjugation of woman and reproduce social biases.

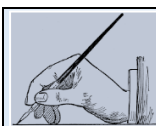
12.9 ECOCRITICISM OR GREEN STUDIES

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment. Just as feminist criticism examines traditional literary texts from perspectives of gender, eco-critics reread canonical texts from an ecological perspective. Ecocriticism or Green Studies “designates the critical writings

which explores the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the damage being wrought on that environment by human activities” (Abrams and Harpham 81). Most ecocritical works deal with the consequences of human actions which are damaging the planet’s life support systems. A number of creative writers in the last two decades have made it a vital point to deal with nature and landscape in their literary texts. Among these writers, Arundhati Roy expresses her deep concern for both human beings and the environment through her activism and writings. In her Booker prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy portrays the scenery of the small village Ayemenem and describes both the beauty of the landscape and its subsequent degradation brought about by human intervention and callousness.

As a theoretical discourse, ecocriticism also looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts. In *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams argues how English literature contributed to the construction of particular notions of nature and culture. Ecocriticism examines how representations of nature in literary and cultural texts shape our environmental imagination and action and our sense of place. It explores how certain place-specific metaphors as wilderness, virgin land, desert are used in literary and cultural texts that develop specific attitudes towards the non-human life, woman, nature and landscape. “Ecocritics worry that too much attention to nature as a cultural and ideological construct, or rather a multiplicity of constructs made by different groups, will lead to neglect of nature as an objective, material and vulnerable reality” (Kerridge in Waugh 531).

All of human culture is linked to the physical world and is affected by and has an effect on environment. Thus, literary texts are not simply reflections of environmental conditions; they even construct attitudes towards non-human life through their depictions of the human- non-human relationship.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the difference between base and superstructure?

2. What is ideology?

3. Who wrote *The Political Unconscious*?

4. What is ecocriticism?

12.10 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have discussed one of the important and influential sociological criticism, Marxist criticism which emphasizes the ideological underpinnings of literature. It explores the ways in which literary texts conceal real social and economic conditions while making the reader believe that such conditions are “natural”. While doing so, we presented the important theorists of Marxist criticism who are also responsible for remodelling certain concepts of Marxist theory in later stage.

Then we discussed New Historicism that paid attention to the historical, social, economic contexts of a literary text. Influenced by anthropologists and philosophers of history, the new historicists began to see contexts and texts as reflection of real, material condition of social struggle.

On the other hand, Feminist literary criticism seeks to uncover the ideology of patriarchal society in literary texts. It shows how the text naturalises the oppression of women through stereotypical representation of women as weak, docile, seductive, sentimental and so on. After going through this unit, you will be able to know the basic ideologies that form a particular critical theory. You will also be able to compare and contrast various theoretical practices of these.



12.11 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the basic assumptions of Marxist theory?
2. How does Marxist theory apply to literature?
3. What is the Marxist view of the relationship between ideology and literature?
4. What are the main principles of New Historicism? Do you think New Historicism is influenced also by Marxist Criticism?
5. What are the basic assumptions of feminism? How do other critical theories discussed in this unit can be related to Feminist theories?



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MODULE V: POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND CRITICISM

UNIT 13: POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND CRITICISM: CONTEXTS, KEY TERMS AND FIGURES

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Learning Objectives
- 13.2 Contextualising Postcolonial Theory
- 13.3 Key Terms
 - 13.3.1 Orientalism
 - 13.3.2 The Other
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13.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit attempts to provide the reader with an overview of what comprises Postcolonial theory in terms of the major assumptions, critics and philosophers associated with it. While discussing the major issues and terminologies attributed to the postcolonial critical tradition, the unit briefly surveys how postcolonial theory or criticism developed as a distinctive critical field around the last decade of the twentieth century as a result of certain changes that came to be discerned in the approaches, methods and ways of study in the fields of literature, sociology, anthropology and other branches of social sciences. In this rather novel approach adopted in various areas of the humanities

and social sciences, one acknowledged the influence of the colonizing forces in the emergence of the now decolonized culture while simultaneously arguing that such influences were not without cultural and political schema, owing to which the colonies came to exist as it were. The complexities involved in disentangling the decolonized culture from the overpowering ideological assumptions of the imperial forces provide the template upon which postcolonialism rests as a mode of enquiry and critical approach. was an idea the Postcolonial critics not only subvert the idea of Europe acting as the undisputed referent in almost all fields of study, but also interrogate the expansionist ideologies of the imperial forces, making explicit the ideological assumptions responsible behind the construction of the colonial subject and a worldview that conformed to the imperialist agenda while masking the politics of construction at the same time.

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to provide:

- a general understanding of Postcolonial theory as a major school of literary criticism
- an idea of the trajectory of the Postcolonial school
- a brief account of the important figures and their significant contributions
- an understanding of the key concepts
- an idea of the impact of Postcolonial theory on the successive growth of other theoretical/critical approaches in literary studies

13.2 CONTEXTUALISING POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Postcolonial theory embraces an analytical understanding of often conflicting and divergent issues within an interdisciplinary framework. Within the academia, difference in perspective may be attributed to the varied approaches associated with different disciplines of knowledge having equally diverse objects of inquiry. It is for this reason that postcolonial criticism comes to be seen as an area invested with intense complexities that are unique to it. However, one may discern certain qualifying traits which inform

postcolonialism. As an area of critical literary engagement and a mode of theoretical research, postcolonialism acts as a point of reference from which, historically speaking, the period of decolonization is understood to have begun, bringing along with it an altered perspective in intellectual engagements in the fields of culture, politics and society. Apart from this, postcolonialism is also considered to refer to a genre of literature earlier called ‘Third World’ or ‘Commonwealth’ literature, so as to include within it “colonial discourse analysis, to detail the situations of migrant groups within First World states, and to specify oppositional reading practices” (Mongia, 2).

Owing to the multitudinous practices adopted within the critical terrain of postcolonialism, it becomes rather difficult to provide a precise definition of postcolonialism and to discern the specificities of the critical methods it entails. Therefore as students of literary theory, one may engage in the task of analyzing the differences of perspectives while debating the various critical and reading practices involved, so as to arrive at an understanding of how colonial discourse led to a proliferation of social and cultural constructs that served the purpose of an imperial agenda. Eminent postcolonial theorist and thinker Homi Bhabha’s contention that “The term postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonized Third World comes to be framed in the West” (Mongia, 1), may be considered a matrix from which students of literary theory can make an attempt to understand and comprehend this rather complex approach. Bhabha’s remark encapsulates certain significant aspects that characterize the term postcolonial – that, as a critical term, it refers to the critique of the Western representation of the historical experience of colonialism; that, while engaging in the critique of the Western representation what emerges as significant is the point of view of the colonized subject that informs postcolonial discourse, which makes an attempt to explore the aftermath of colonialism for colonized people and colonizing forces as well.

Therefore, in order to understand the implications of postcolonialism, one must have an idea of the significance of colonialism along with accompanying

imperial structures which conditioned the exercise of exploitative mechanisms under the mask of civilization and progress. In its most general sense, colonialism implies a historical and political mode of expansionism practised by European imperial powers, especially the British, with an intention of legitimizing its political ideology of exploitation and expansion upon the so-called Third World nations where it established most of its colonies. Colonies therefore became the resourceful terrain upon which imperial capitalist forces thrived. Subsequently, with greater access to the modes of production and capital, the imperialist owners indulged in the institutionalization of their power, thereby etching a sharply defined hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized within which the notion of equality and fair-mindedness was conspicuously absent. The colonies comprised the natives, who belonged to an alien culture in relation to the colonial masters. Within the unique categorization practised by the imperial masters, the indigenous people and their distinctive socio-cultural traits came to be looked down upon as inherently inferior, which enabled the colonial enterprise of appropriation of resources including the land and its people, to continue without resistance for quite a long period of time. The repercussions of colonialism were obvious on the land and its people, in the modes of production and use of capital. However, we need to understand that such external exercise of imperial ideology was strengthened through a deliberate and systematized body of discourse produced under colonial regime which imbibed the imperial politics of identity and racial construction with an aim to authorize and legitimize the hegemony of colonial powers. To put it in simple terms, discourse implies

. . . a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups. As a social formation it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends.” (Ashcroft *et al*, 42)

Certain qualifying traits that mark discourse are that it is a system constituted by the dominant group through which an attempt is made to represent a world order that is inclusive of the objects as well as the subjects upon which it

dominates. Thus, one encounters in colonial discourse the representation of the apparently inherent inferiority of the colonized subject in a hegemonic narration that intends to justify the imposition of the imperial structures and knowledge. It is a body of knowledge engendered by the exercise of imperial power within which the colonizer, the colonized and their unique hierarchical relationship is represented. Quite interestingly, it is through this discourse that the native arrives at a self-impression as a result of which a strange sense of conflict is created, owing to the oppositional knowledge within which the colonized finds him/herself. The Eurocentric enterprise of civilizing and modernising the apparently uncivilized native therefore resulted in an elimination of the native's social, racial, historical, cultural and other forms of knowledge as primitive.

Postcolonialism, thus, emerged in the era of decolonization as a form of resistance to the imperial construction of the colonized as represented in the narratives of power. It embraces a critique of the hegemonic knowledge order structured around the idea of Eurocentrism to arrive at an understanding of the politics of legitimatisation in the colonial era. In the field of literature and critical theory, postcolonialism may be considered as a practice of reading/rereading

. . . texts both metropolitan and colonial cultures to draw deliberate attention to the profound and inescapable effects of colonization on literary production; anthropological accounts; historical records; administrative and scientific writing...which demonstrates the extent to which the text contradicts its underlying assumptions...and reveal its (often unwitting) colonialist ideologies and processes. (Ashcroft et al, 192)

As mentioned earlier, postcolonialism embraces a mode of critical and literary inquiry that's as vast as it is diverse, developed over the years with significant contributions from critics and theorists who belong to different backgrounds in terms of their spatial and socio-cultural location. However, differences in their perspectives do not imply that they have radically divergent standpoints. In the works of all these postcolonial critics and thinkers certain common lines of thought may be discerned. According to eminent critic Peter Barry, individual differences notwithstanding, all practitioners of postcolonialism generally:

- Reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seek to show its limitations of outlook, especially its general inability to empathise across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference.
- Examine the representation of other cultures in literature as a way of achieving this end.
- Show how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with colonization and imperialism.
- Foreground questions of cultural difference and diversity and examine their treatment in relevant literary works.
- Celebrate hybridity and ‘cultural polyvalency’, that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the coloniser, through a colonial school system, and that of the colonised, through local and oral traditions).
- Develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived ‘Otherness’ are seen as sources of energy and potential change. (Barry, 199)

It appears quite clear from Barry’s analysis that postcolonial criticism involves a critique of the representation of otherness in Western canonical literatures and their inability to identify with differences in the colonised cultures, ethnic and otherwise. Such criticism also questions the ‘silence’ of Western literatures while foregrounding the issues of cultural diversity and difference. Postcolonial criticism thus engenders a perspective that enables the critics, philosophers, thinkers and practitioners alike, to revel in the conditions of plurality, marginality and difference embedded in the decolonised culture, thereby giving shape to the realisation that ‘Otherness’ can be seen as representing hybridity and cultural polyvalence.

The year 1961 saw the publication of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* in French, considered as one of the most pioneering works in the area of postcolonial criticism. Fanon argued that the first step for ‘colonised’ people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries the European colonising power will have devalued the nation’s past, seeing its precolonial era as a pre-civilised limbo, or even as a historical void...if the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist’s ideology by which the past has been devalued (Barry, 193). Fanon is also reputed for having authored other

accomplished texts such as *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (1952), both precursors to his seminal 1961 publication.

However, postcolonial criticism in the real sense of the term may be said to have been initiated with Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Published in 1978, Said's foundational text critiques the Eurocentric construction of colonial discourse. Contemporary figures in postcolonial school include Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Benita Parry among others.

13.3 KEY TERMS

13.3.1 Orientalism

Edward Said's *Orientalism* introduced the concept of Orientalism to the oeuvre of postcolonial theory. According to Said, Orientalism is a mode of probing the ways in which the Orient came to be produced and is still being produced in Western discourse. Moving beyond the confines of professional Orientalism that embraces diverse disciplines in the humanities, Said asserts that it has a much broader canvas. Orientalism may be considered as a theoretical tool that establishes a new perspective in reading colonial discourse. The significance of Orientalism lies in the fact that while it was a mode of knowing the other, it also served as the absolute illustration of the production of the other. Thus, it's important to understand that Said considers Orientalism "as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (*Orientalism*, 3).

Said's work is considered seminal in the field of postcolonial theory owing to its critique of Western discourse – the Western representation of non-Western cultures within the socio-political framework of colonial era. Western representation encompasses the field of humanities as well as fictional representations of the Orient one comes across in numerous narratives – novels, historical accounts, travelogues and even present-day media. Said's primary contention is that such Western discourse served to further the imperial agenda of expansionism, thereby producing knowledge structures which conformed to the ideological paradigms of the dominant colonial class. It is through the

discursive practices of the West that the Orient is produced, so as to accomplish the hegemonic objectives of the colonisers. Representing the dominant culture as apparently unbiased, the dominant class produces certain knowledge patterns founded on its values and agenda that ensures the complicity of the colonised. Said is of the opinion that Orientalism is a form of academic engagement that unveils more about the fantasising Western imagination rather than revealing a comprehensive understanding of the East in terms of its people, society, culture, myth and history. Therefore, Orientalism may be understood as an extension of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction...but also of a whole series of 'interests' which...it not only creates but maintains. It *is*, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different world. (*Orientalism*, 12)

13.3.2 The Other

Taken in its most general sense, the Other implies an entity that is separate from the self. The presence of the 'other' is essential to an understanding of the self or what is considered the normal or given category since the process of signification works along the route of binaries. Therefore, for a legitimate and authentic self to exist, the existence of an 'other' is of crucial importance. The notion of the other is seen embedded in the Western discourse of colonialism, which postcolonial critics consider a mode of control and subordination adopted by the imperial masters. Attributing primitivism and a mythic and savage existence to the subject race, the colonisers were able to establish and legitimise the exploitative expansionist agenda and hegemonic worldview to which they subscribed.

In the field of existential philosophy, *other* as a term is employed to discuss the connections between the self and the other in relation to ideas such as identity and self-awareness. However, contemporary postcolonial theory draws from Freudian and Lacanian assumptions regarding the emergence of the notion of subjectivity. For the latter, the other implies the self in the process of discerning one's identity. In relation to postcolonial theory, the other thus may

be considered as the marginalized others, the colonised body of people/culture constructed through colonial discourse, their mark of identity being their difference from the imperial centre. The Other, on the contrary, is the supreme Other through whose gaze the subject comes into existence and attains a sense of identity. Thus, the Other may be compared to colonial discourse, imperial centre or even the empire itself in that it bestows a sense of identity upon the subject people, the colonised race, foregrounding their otherness. Moreover, in a significant manner imperial discourse also functions as the matrix or absolute point of reference through which the subject people arrive at an understanding of themselves and their lived experience.

13.3.3 Hybridity

In postcolonial parlance, the term hybridity has come to be associated with Homi K. Bhabha, who focuses on the mutual relationship patterns shared by the coloniser and the colonised to arrive at an understanding that the subjectivities of both are interdependent. Hybridity, put in simple terms, implies cross cultural exchange which has come to be widely criticized for its disregard and failure to notice the disparity and one-sidedness of power structure within which the coloniser and the colonised are located. Considered as one of the most significant terms crucial to postcolonial thinking, it is also one of the most widely debated terms. Hybridisation occurs at the point of contact between imperial cultures with that of the colonised or marginal culture at the moment of colonisation, thereby giving shape to a new culture in the process, in the Third Space of hybrid existence.

13.3.4 Ambivalence

Ambivalence is a term drawn primarily from the field of psychoanalysis and incorporated into postcolonial criticism by Homi K. Bhabha to represent the intricate intermingling of desirability and revulsion that marks the relationship between the imperial master and the colonised subject. Characteristically ambivalent in nature, this relationship suggests that the colonised is seldom seen in opposition to the coloniser. While the colonised reflects complicity and resistance to the hegemonic operations of the imperial culture, it is the fluctuating nature of this complicity and resistance that produces ambivalence. The manner

in which imperial ideology relates to the colonial subject engenders a sense of ambivalence owing to the fact that it may be both manipulative and nurturing. What is significant in Bhabha's approach to ambivalence is the understanding that the production of ambivalence would entail interference in the absolute hegemony of imperial discourse while upsetting the uncomplicated equation between the coloniser and the colonised. Perceived as a threat to the authority of colonial power, ambivalence may be seen as the corollary to the fluctuating relationship between the imperial power and the subject nation. It is the element of ambivalence that marks colonial relationship while implying at the same time that such a relationship is susceptible to destruction.

13.3.5 Liminality

Having its origins in the term 'limen' which implies a threshold, liminality is a word used especially in psychology to denote the threshold between the sense and the subliminal or subconscious, that is, the margin beyond which a certain sensation loses perceptibility. In relation to postcolonial criticism, liminality is a term that has particular importance in describing the Third Space within which cultural transformation takes place. It is a space within which the politics of selfhood, both private and communal, may be illustrated. It is a terrain where unceasing flux and substitutions occur. Homi Bhabha derives from Renee Green the idea of liminality – Green, the art historian had characterized the stairwell as a liminal space to imply how such a space may become the locale for symbolic exchange and transformation. Thus postcolonial discourse may also be considered to be operational at the liminal space since it is within this Third Space that “the polarities of imperial rhetoric on one hand, and national or racial characterisation on the other, are continually questioned and problematized” (Ashcroft et al, 131).

13.3.6 Mimicry

Mimicry is a term that has come to be recognised as crucial to the understanding of ambivalence in the area of postcolonial theory. Mimicry elaborates on the idea of ambivalence that marks the relationship shared by the coloniser and the colonized. As the hegemonic discourse of imperialism incites the colonial subject to 'mimic' the superior culture through an imitation of their

habits, customs, practices and values, it results in a hazy recreation of the same in the colonised culture. This imitation is rather intimidating as it cannot replicate the original culture; on the contrary, the 'mimic' version emerges as a mockery or parody – an inferior imitation which poses a threat to the claim for superiority of the imperial culture.

Mimicry is employed by Bhabha in the context of ambivalence which he brings in to illustrate the characteristic of colonial discourse. Thus mimicry may be seen as the *modus operandi* through which the colonised subject is replicated as “almost the same, but not quite” (The Location of Culture, 86). The limitations that mark the hegemony of colonial discourse are exposed by mimicry.

13.3.7 Subaltern

Introduced by Antonio Gramsci to imply 'inferior rank' in context of those groups in society who are subjected to the hegemony of a superior class, subaltern is a term that has been now recognised in postcolonial theory as implying colonial subjects, marginal cultures and peripheral identities that exist within a society. The term has been borrowed and employed by the Subaltern Studies group of historians that comprises Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee and David Arnold among others. In their voluminous work titled *Subaltern Studies*, these historians, sociologists, critics engage with the idea of subalternity manifest in diverse disciplines of academic pursuits as well as in the socio-cultural and political lives of the nation. The subaltern became a crucial presence in postcolonial criticism owing to Gayatri Spivak's famed essay titled “Can the subaltern speak?”, in which the critic questions the claims of autonomy of the subaltern entities as emphasised by the Subaltern Studies group. Extending her scope to the feminist struggle, Spivak argues that the issue of subalternity in relation to the gendered subjects and especially, Indian women, gives rise to added complexities for these categories need to be considered “both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” (28).

13.4 KEY FIGURES

Frantz Fanon (1925 – 1961)

Born in the year 1925 in Martinique, a Caribbean Island, Frantz Fanon studied medicine in France while specialising in the field of psychiatry. He began practicing as a psychiatrist in Algeria under the French colonial administration. While in service, Fanon was witness to the bitter experiences of the anti-colonial Algerian revolution. His background in psychiatry enabled him to look beyond the apparent and realise the violent and phobic incongruities that informed the colonial machinery. Subsequently, Fanon resigned from his service and became one of the most effectual and compelling voices of the revolution, a voice that became manifest in his writings which engaged in an in depth critique of colonial ideology while advocating an equitable and rational restructuring of society. Fanon's writings are of particular interest to the decolonized cultures in their effort to give shape to a new national literature in the era of post colonial existence as well to the literatures emerging from peripheral voices such as those of women, European and North American minorities.

The theory of the stages in the evolution of literature of all colonized people is attributed to Fanon in which he proposes that the evolution of literature of a colonized culture may be seen as happening through three stages. In the first stage, which according to Fanon is a stage of apprenticeship, the colonized culture conceives its national literature in an imitation of the conventions practised and models adopted by the colonizing cultures. The second stage is marked by an elimination of the hegemonic authority of the paradigms that inform colonizer's discourse. At the same time, this stage reflects a wistful articulation of the desire for bringing to fore the inherent and native traditions of the colonized culture. For Fanon, the third stage refers to a 'fighting' stage whereby a new literature emerges in which new thematic formulations are anticipated that are identical to the movements initiated to put an end to the colonial rule, while efforts are made to structure a literature founded on truly egalitarian and democratic values. In addition to this, Fanon's ideas pertaining to the psychoanalytic and linguistic parameters in relation to the construction of

subjectivity, alterity, identity are of crucial importance in the field of contemporary critical theory.

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* is an analytical exploration of race, colonialism and culture in which he moves beyond conventional modes of examination of political and economic foundations of colonisation while underscoring the psychoanalytic and linguistic factors. The latter perspective allowed Fanon to figure out the subjective formation of the colonizer and the colonized as 'racialised' subjects with their accompanying phobias and anxieties within their respective existential situations. However, Fanon also argued that the psychoanalytic perspectives alone were not sufficient for analyses of the colonial machinery, which could be considered as a framework within which economic exploitation, political restrictions and cultural injunctions were executed through various modes of signification that included discourse, media and popular culture as well.

Edward Said (1935 – 2004)

Edward W Said, born in the year 1935, belonged to an affluent but displaced family of Christian Palestinians and grew up in the posh surroundings of Cairo. Several influential factors may be attributed to have affected Said since his childhood days, some of which include the effect of missionaries, British colonialism, the American patriotism professed by his father, the suppressing of Arab history, culture and language within his family and its silence about Palestine, his English education, his American education and citizenship thereof since birth. Apart from these, the socio-political and cultural upheavals in the aftermath of 1948 and 1967 revealed to Said rather early that universalist categories such as Europe, Islam or America, for instance, may be considered as structures.

Said may be considered to have shaped the trajectory of postcolonial discourse through an articulation of the need to develop a contrapuntal reading practice that would enable one to arrive at the political and historical underpinnings of narratives that resulted in certain socio-cultural structures which, in turn, reinforce the former, while at the same time asserting that at the root of knowledge lay the notions of privilege and power and that such

knowledge seemed to be generated with a specific social, cultural and political purpose. Published in 1975, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* introduced Said's notion of contrapuntal reading practice, an idea which he was to deal with and explore in later works such as *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1978) among others. However, in his works, Said does not appear dismissive of the pre-eminence of European academic and literary traditions. On the contrary, what he suggests is the need to situate texts within their socio-political contexts that would allow one to realize the political and historical foundations of narratives, thereby enriching intellectual and artistic legitimacy of the critical process.

In *Orientalism*, considered a milestone in the trajectory of postcolonial theory, Said's critique of the hegemonic constructions of imperial discourse are put forward from a non-Western, non-imperial point of view, in a tone that is a combination of both post-structuralism (Michel Foucault) and Western Marxism (Antonio Gramsci). As Said opines, "In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals" (25). Employing Foucauldian and Gramscian notions of discourse and theories on correlations of political and civil society respectively, Said discusses how textual and discursive practices may be attributed to imperial hegemony while unmasking the Western claims to objectivity and revealing the embeddedness of hegemonic stereotypes in colonial rhetoric.

Said's *Orientalism* may be said to reflect a threefold approach constituted, firstly, by his contention that Orientalism is an academic discipline. Secondly, Said considers Orientalism as a Eurocentric philosophy founded on the binaries of Orient/Occident or East/West and lastly, as a discursive practice that reiterates the import of colonial authority, dominance and imperial hegemony while focusing on the tacit conformity of Western academia with imperial power. Reaffirming his standpoint, Said states, "The fact is that Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new [American] imperialism, where its ruling paradigms do not contest, and even confirm, the continuing imperial design to dominate Asia" (*Orientalism*, 322). Considered as

one of the most influential texts in postcolonial discourse even today, Said's *Orientalism* may be said to have contributed towards critical thinking by opening up vistas of inquiry in the context of the Western construction of the Orient, a distorted and motivated structure that remains at the heart of colonial ideology while revealing how Orientalism, seen as representation and a discursive practice, is founded on the patterns of power and hegemonic structure located within the culture of imperialism.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said continues with his earlier engagement reflected in *Orientalism*. While extending its scope to the global perspective in terms of imperial culture, discursive practices and anti-imperial resistance, Said engages with literary productions from the West and counter literature produced from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Ireland and so on. In his opinion, the focus of this book lay in expanding “the arguments of the earlier book to describe a more general pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories” (ix). *Culture and Imperialism* engages in an intensive exploration of globalization in relation to the local in a manner that seeks to put beside culture and imperialism in his attempt to analyse texts in relation to their historical specificities. In all his writings Said seems to be reiterating the idea that the postcolonial nation state may be considered as a limitation within which anti-imperialist representations operate owing to the fact that anti-imperialism is an aftermath of imperial ideology and as such it is designed within the parameters of Western ideological assumptions. Therefore, the significance of transnational spatiality represented through borders, hybridity, marginality, diaspora, exile and so on becomes all the more pertinent in any attempt to critically engage with postcolonial counter discourse.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942 –)

Born in Kolkata in 1942, Gayatri Spivak accomplished her undergraduate degree in English in Calcutta and migrated to the U.S. to pursue higher education in 1962 in Cornell University where she studied comparative literature. She rose to prominence with her extraordinary academic achievements and was appointed as Avalon Professor in the Humanities at Columbia in 1992. She translated Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie*

(1967) as *Of Grammatology* in 1976 which is considered to be an outstanding contribution in the field of criticism and literary theory, establishing her as one of the most prominent critics in the realm of postcolonial cultural studies. As a postcolonial cultural critic, Spivak's area of interest lay in discourse rather than pure literature and literary criticism.

A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999) is a collection of essays recognized as one of the most prominent works in the area of feminist and postcolonial criticism for its radical approach to reading practice that embraced both canonical and non canonical authors. The essays in this collection cohere around Spivak's argument that the identity of the colonial subject may be attributed to the discursive practices and tropes represented in hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourse. Extending her critical attention to the field of feminism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and neo Marxist theories, Spivak intends to achieve a form of cultural critique, a mode of postcolonial criticism which intends to bring together these diverse approaches with the aim of revealing their limitations and disagreements as well as their mutual points of convergence. Unlike Said, who is critical of deconstruction and Marxism, and Bhabha, who views Marxism with cynicism, Spivak on the other hand appears to sympathise with both the schools. Forming 'the Holy Trinity' of postcolonial theorists along with Said and Bhabha, Spivak is the lone theorist among the three to have professed a sustained engagement with feminism in her practice of postcolonialism. While both Said and Bhabha focus on the dominant ideologies of Western discourse or the comparatively empowered figure of the postcolonial critic, Spivak's focus, on the contrary, is the relatively marginalised and less privileged. In her seminal essay titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak includes the underprivileged from all classes into her analysis of the subaltern and especially the female subaltern, who she states is marginalized doubly owing to economic factors and gender construction.

In her critical engagement in relation to the subaltern, Spivak's fundamental focus is to examine whether the subaltern can express him/herself rather than being represented, for the latter involves manipulation and distortion of reality. Spivak's notions regarding representation of the subaltern or the

oppressed may be seen reflected in her remark that “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak” (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 103). Considering the female as a subaltern within the spatial location of society and culture including history, she reveals how the female subaltern is situated in the margins of silence and is always being ‘represented’. That the radical intellectuals of the West champion for the cause of the subaltern is debated methodologically by Spivak, who appears critical of such an idea, since these intellectuals according to Spivak hang on to a hegemonic notion of the omniscient self in context of the oppressed and underprivileged. The politics of representation needs to be debated and resisted in order to reach at an understanding of pattern of relationships of power and authority shared between the dominant and the subaltern groups.

Homi K. Bhabha (1949 –)

Homi Bhabha is recognised as one of the most influential figures in the domain of contemporary critical and literary theory, especially postcolonial cultural theory. Bhabha was born and brought up in Bombay from where he migrated to England in the early 1970s to pursue higher studies. As mentioned earlier, Bhabha is considered as one of the members of ‘the Holy Trinity’ for his pathbreaking work on postcolonial theory that involves an examination of the ideological foundations of colonial authority. Adopting a deconstructive approach, Bhabha critiques the binaries of West/East, Occident/Orient, coloniser/colonised, the centre/the periphery, the self/the other and so on. Bhabha’s proposition that Western ideological structures function along binaries is an adaptation of the Derridean method and like the latter, he argues that such binaries are too simplistic as they assume that any national culture is unitary and homogenous, having a fixed essential centre. On the contrary, Bhabha coins the term ‘hybridity’ to represent the peculiar culture of a nation that embraces within its fold notions of nationalities, ethnicities, identities – a multiplicity of hybrid forms that are characterized by indeterminacy and dialogism instead of a unitary, homogenous entity.

Beginning with the critique of discursive practices within colonial literature, Bhabha went on to author several essays that primarily discuss the culture of diaspora and multiculturalism. Besides *Nation and Narration* (1990),

The Location of Culture (1994) is one of Bhabha's major texts in which he initiates several radical ideas that include ambivalence, Third Space, dialogic, liminality among others, through essays that deliberate on the broad spectrum of postcolonial theory. In an essay titled 'The Commitment to Theory' included in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues how the idea of the 'nation' in fact is a narratively produced category rather than being an essentialist entity as commonly believed. His notion of dialogism derives from Mikhail Bakhtin through which he attempts to reach at an understanding of how colonial dominance necessitates an interface between the imperial masters and colonised subjects. As far as his idea of identity is concerned, Bhabha is influenced by Frantz Fanon to a large extent in that like Fanon, Bhabha too adheres to a psychoanalytic model of analysis in his exploration of the enterprise of colonialism. Besides, Bhabha also employs "Lacan's concept of 'mimicry' and the split subject, arguing that there is always an "excess" in the cultural imitation that the colonial subject is forced to produce. This mimicry in turn both revises colonial discourse and creates a new, hybrid identity for the colonial subject" (Leitch, 2378).

13.5 POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM: ITS INFLUENCE

As a critical theory, postcolonialism signifies or attends to the aftermath of imperial culture or colonization on subject nations and races. In its most contemporary sense, postcolonialism is considered as a term which refers to the wide-ranging methods adopted for research and exploration of the imperial territorial occupation with the accompanying colonial institutions, the signifying practices, the subtle hegemonic operations that led to the production of the colonial subject and so on. It is broadly employed in the social sciences as these areas of knowledge engage in a sustained study of the impact of colonialism upon various parts of the world throughout history.

In the discipline of literature, postcolonial reading practices would imply a mode of reading or rather, rereading texts produced within the colonial culture and otherwise to highlight the inevitable consequences of colonisation upon the production of discourse in varied subjects that range from anthropology

to history, from scientific descriptions to administrative accounts. So far as its method is concerned, postcolonial reading adopts a deconstructive approach to texts produced by the colonisers while revealing the extent to which the discourse stands in opposition to its fundamental assumptions and caters to the imperialist ideological operations.

In order to have an ample assessment of postcolonial literary and critical practice, one may refer to the renowned work authored by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin titled *The Empire Writes Back*. Published in 1989, the work is considered as one of the pioneering texts in the field of postcolonial studies. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1991) authored by Ashcroft and his co-authors also provide valuable material on significant issues pertaining to postcolonial thinking. Another influential text is *Postcolonial Theory* by Moore-Gilbert published in 1997 which presents an outstanding introduction to the key thinkers engaged in the field of postcolonial criticism. Apart from such texts, one may assess the significant influence of postcolonialism on literature and critical practice by reviewing various texts that have been produced during the last decade on various themes. One can witness the impact of postcolonial thinking in the works of the Caribbean authors such as Wilson Harris and V.S. Naipaul who, for example employs Bhabha's idea of liminality and mimicry. In the novels of Nigerian author Amos Tutuola one would come across the concepts of the unsettling, transnational, hybrid forms theorised by Bhabha.

13.6 SUMMING UP

Postcolonial critical practice focuses on the issues of difference in terms of culture, identity, subjectivity, gender, ethnicity and class. In relation to the social and cultural environment in the present era of a global hybridised nationalism, postcolonial literary practices appear to be centred especially around literature coming from the once colonised territories namely Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, while addressing a broad array of issues, some of which have been mentioned above. It is important to understand that in engaging in postcolonial criticism one needs to keep in mind the specific socio-cultural

perspective within which one is situated so as to avoid the risks of superficiality that arise from a mere imitation of the theoretical assumptions upon which it is founded.



13.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how postcolonial theory and criticism engages in a critique of colonial discourse.
2. What do you think postcolonial critics do, according to Peter Barry's opinion?
3. Discuss the contribution of Frantz Fanon in providing a new approach to the study of decolonised cultures.
4. Write short notes on:
 - i) The Orient
 - ii) The Other/other
 - iii) Mimicry
 - iv) Ambivalence
5. Consider Said's *Orientalism* as a text that engages with the idea of relationship between production of knowledge and power in relation to Eurocentric discourse.
6. "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak." Discuss the statement in context of Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern.



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UNIT 14: EDWARD SAID: FRAMES FOR RE-READING THE CANON

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Learning Objectives
- 14.2 Said- Intention and Method
- 14.3 The Shaping of Frames
- 14.4 The Influence of Foucault
- 14.5 Re-reading *Great Expectations*
- 14.6 Summing Up: Frames for Re-reading
- 14.7 Assessment Questions
- 14.8 References and Recommended Readings

14.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with Postcolonial Theory and its significant traits as well as the key concepts and figures associated with it. Edward Said is considered one of the most important figures in postcolonial theory owing to his critique of colonial discourse which he had represented in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). In *Orientalism*, Said reveals how cultural politics plays a very decisive role in the ‘production of academic knowledge’ and that it is very often the ideological position and the situational context of the colonisers which influenced such ‘knowledge’ and the values associated with it. In the collection titled *The World, the Text and the Critic*, a compilation of essays written during 1969 to 1981 on varied topics, Said writes:

texts are worldly, to some degrees they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted (4).

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit is a continuation of the previous unit. In this unit, it is intended that the learners shall be acquainted especially with

- Edward Said and his contribution to postcolonial reading practices.
- works of Said which represent his theoretical approach to the reading of canon.
- detailed discussion of Said's contrapuntal reading method through specific examples.

14.2 SAID- INTENTION AND METHOD

Said's afore-mentioned observation makes it very clear how a text does not appear in a void; rather texts are very much the product of the physical circumstances within which they are produced. Thus, to read a text as a work of the author which, apart from the artistic value and its academic quotient, has no other significance, would be a rather naïve and innocent approach. As Said has observed, texts are 'worldly' and even when the texts 'appear' to be apolitical, ahistorical and pure forms of knowledge base, it is not so. The human condition – social, political, economic, cultural and so on - certainly manifests in subtle manners and lends its own inputs through the peculiar condition of the author and the situation in which the writing takes place. Thus, to consider everything said in a text to be 'true' and 'pure' would be a rather one-dimensional perspective missing out on the underlying currents of politics of construction at a given period in relation to the production of the text. The discursive meanings of the text becomes apparent when one begins to read the text as "a part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments" which then reveals the deep contextual realities within which a particular text and its meaning is legitimised. Thus, the whole process of reading and knowledge formation, according to Said, is a matter of "intention and method". That one has to take into consideration the situational context of the writer, which plays

an influential role in the process of knowledge formation, is an idea which Said reiterates in one of his early works, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*:

the writer's life, his career, and his text form a system of relationships whose configuration *in real human time* becomes progressively stronger (227).

Said's own peculiar condition – his life as a dislocated Palestinian and his western education and American citizenship - were to a large extent responsible in shaping his academic and intellectual position. He was himself an active supporter for the Palestinian cause despite his distinguished career in English and Comparative literature in Columbia University. Thus, one can trace in him the political and the academic become enmeshed in a manner that produced in him the critical sensibilities towards the knowledge formation that had happened during the imperial period, especially in the context of the colonised cultures. Therefore, it is significant that Said's personal situation was of primary importance, whereby his experience of displacement, marginality and hybridity - his 'contemporary reality' - resulted in the development of "an influential type of cultural and literary criticism".

14.3. THE SHAPING OF FRAMES

Said's 'frames for re-reading the canon' may be comprehended through his works on varied subject matter with an equally varied scope. In all his works, Said presents the 'frame' for 're-reading' through his "oppositional or counter hegemonic intellectualism that is committed to global social justice and recognises its own cultural limitations and ideological interpellations" (Milz 825). Continuing his intellectual engagement with contrapuntal reading of Western discourse since his early *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, which subverted the hegemonic ideological construction of knowledge and relationship systems, Said reiterates his stand in his 1978 publication *Orientalism* that came to be considered as one of most important texts in the field of postcolonial theory. With his assertion of the need to resist homogenising ideological discourse constructed by the Western academe, the most influential theoretical concept that

Said gave to the intellectual world was that of orientalism. In his eponymous book, Said presented to the intellectual world his argument against the Western conception of the 'East as the Other', revealing how European culture 'produced' the East as its inferior other, the Orient in opposition to the Occident. According to Said, imperialist discourse and the western intellectual, seem to be subservient to the cultural hegemony of West while dealing with the non-Western Orient. Said's re-reading of Western orientalism is revisionist in its approach which provides a non-Western and non-imperial perception of colonisation as well as the imperial enterprise of the West. In this practice, Said appears to be significantly influenced by Michel Foucault's conception of 'discourse' – Said refers to Foucault's texts such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge, Discipline and Punish* and also *The Order of Things* to deliberate upon how, in order to revisit the texts established by the Western canon, it is necessary to engage with the 'discursive regime of language'. Through his intensive discussion of the hegemonic construction of the 'canon' in Western parlance, Said reveals how the West had in fact engaged with the "formation of a discipline and the delimitation of the object...[that is] restrictive...in their own way to be subsequently productive." . According to Foucault, discourse always involves a form of violence in the way it imposes its linguistic order on the world: knowledge has to conform to its paradigms in order to be recognised as legitimate. It is necessary to grasp that in the field of literary studies, Eurocentrism appears to play a decisive role in formulating the 'canon' which is very often constituted by western paradigms, as a result of which the linguistic order and knowledge structures conforming to the western paradigms stand legitimised. Knowledge, according to Said, is not an apolitical construction; it is the product of a particular form of power; therefore, the question of objectivity needs to be examined deeply. Academic knowledge then is a construct which cannot claim objectivity and autonomy as Said notes in *Orientalism*:

The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony...is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient (6).

In his attempt to provide an oppositional perspective towards hegemonic Western intellectualism, Said observes in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981) that it is important for the academic world to challenge the lopsided allocation and exercise of power across the globe. It is this approach that makes Said observe that the inherent task of criticism is to stand in opposition to “every form of tyranny, domination and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interest of human freedom” (29). It is important to keep in mind that knowledge is bestowed with specific responsibilities – social, cultural and political, and knowledge is produced through the specific mechanisms of power and privilege enjoyed by the dominant ideology. Therefore, it becomes all the more imperative to engage in a non-linear reading of the narrative representations beyond the conventional structuralist paradigms. However, this is not to say that Said disregards conventional intellectualism and the conformist literary practices of the West; rather, through his revisionist approach.

When Said authored *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he appeared to reiterate similar concerns which he had deliberated upon in *Orientalism*; however, his scope had broadened by now to include imperial culture, discourse and anti-imperial resistance in the global context. His study in this takes into account counter literature which emerged from Asia, Africa, countries from the middle East and the Caribbean as well in resistance to the canonical literature of the West. In doing so, Said was in fact making an effort to read the complex relationship patterns that existed between the modern west and the territories which were its colonies and spread out across the globe. Said’s method here was to look at discourses while situating them within the local in relation to the larger context of globalisation. Through his reading, he made an effort to compare and contrast the dynamics of culture and imperialism while analysing texts and contemporary historical contexts to reveal the complex network of relationships that exercised significant influence in the production of texts and legitimising the meanings thereof. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said takes up for analysis western canonical texts, namely Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Charles Dickens’s *Great*

Expectations, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* among others, in order to reveal that the process of canon formation appears to be influenced by the socio-cultural, political and historical factors of the contemporary times and such a process lacks objectivity. The western formulation of literary canon, according to Said, reflects the orthodox literary consciousness of the west which indulges in a masking of the social reality in its attempt to produce 'truth' and 'knowledge' values which conform to the hegemonic worldview of the West. For him, the process of canon formation was "a blocking device for methodological and disciplinary self-questioning" (22).

It is then quite clear that Said develops his body of critical work as a mode of resistance and critique towards the western conceptualisation of the canon, while providing contrapuntal readings of texts hitherto considered masterpieces in terms of the 'universal' knowledge these offered. Said's intention, like most of the postcolonial cultural critics, is to engage with the processes – social, historical, political and cultural, which contribute greatly towards moulding a text's inner world and giving rise to a sense of 'legitimate' meaning. It is thus important to acknowledge that texts do possess their own politics and having said so, it then becomes imperative as readers to be able to unearth the textual politics of construction which serves the interests of dominant ideological practices despite its apparent autonomous and objective perspective. The west as the sovereign in terms of civilisation, including knowledge, science, religion and all spheres of human activity which takes into its fold literature as well, needs to be questioned so as to enable the reader to arrive at a more critical evaluation of the language, meaning and discursive practices situated within a particular context at a given period of time. The novels mentioned above, with which Said engages in the first section of *Culture and Imperialism* represent western view of the world and human affairs, where non-western representations appear conspicuously in the margins. However, the following section in the same work finds Said taking up some representative works from the non-western culture in his attempt to reveal how authors in this part of the globe indulge in critique of the western hegemonic constructions through their own counter narrative fiction. Said refers to Salman Rushdie, Aime Cesaire, Toni Morrison and Chinua

Achebe, for example, to show how these authors have attempted to question and critique the established western hegemonic worldview through their fiction. The nationalist rhetoric and practices of the west have been found to be oppressive and hegemonic to the extent that it appears unable to accommodate difference, thereby leading to the signification of the 'different' as the 'Other' – always visualised in terms of absence.

14.4 INFLUENCE OF FOUCAULT

Foucault's formulation regarding the relationship between power and knowledge proves handy while contextualising colonial discourses. According to him, power appears closely connected to knowledge in that the latter exercises considerable influence leading to a transformation of power from a mere apparatus structured within the society to a network that shapes and legitimises every day articulations and interactions in relation to a specific society and culture. Power, states Sneja Gunew, "is reproduced in discursive networks at every point where someone who "knows" is instructing someone who doesn't know' (qtd. in Gandhi 74). Said's rationale in the re-reading of canon might be traced in what Gunew has to say about discursive networks - that someone who 'doesn't know' is instructed by someone who apparently 'knows'. The knowledge that the West professes to possess in relation to the non-West the binaries of the Occident and the Orient, then are politically constructed categories which are masked as 'givens' and made to appear 'natural'. The politics of cultural construction legitimised through a particular operation of power and the knowledge thereby produced and made evident in the discursive regimes are at the core of Saidean critiques of the western canon. Said has himself acknowledged in his Introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, while referring to the act of contrapuntal reading that his method in doing so is to focus as much as possible on individual works, to read them first as great products of the creative or interpretative imagination, and then to show them as part of the relationship between culture and empire ...[c]ulture and the aesthetic forms it contains derive from historical experience (xxv).

14.5 RE-READING *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said engages in the act of re-reading the canon – for example, the famous English novel *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Published in 1861 when the Empire was in its zenith under Queen Victoria, the novel narrates the futile efforts of the central character, Pip, to become a ‘gentleman’. Pip, however, has not inherited a legacy nor does he possess the persistently sincere efforts of a hard worker. As he had been of immense help to a convict Abel Magwitch early in his life, Magwitch who was deported to Australia, as was the law then, helps Pip with large sums of money in his attempt display his gratitude towards Pip. However, for the most part Pip remains under the misconception that the rich spinster Miss Havisham was his benefactor. Later, when Magwitch reappears in Pip’s life, the latter is found ill-at-ease because he feels that Magwitch was the opposite of everything that may be considered ‘gentlemanly’. Towards the close of the novel, Pip is shown as accepting the reality by accepting Magwitch, the latter having been rehabilitated in a penal colony that was set up for such people after their expatriation.

At an apparent level, this novel narrates brilliantly the “metropolitan history [which is] both more inclusive and more dynamic” (Said, *Culture* xv). But for Said, Dickens does not remain a mere novelist weaving out a fragment of his imagination through the character of Abel Magwitch; rather, both Dickens and Magwitch partake of the historical reality of contemporary times which reflect upon the relationship of England with its colonies. Though Magwitch belongs to the English soil, his conviction and deportation to Australia and the subsequent ghettoisation in the penal colony reveals how convicts could be ‘transported’ but “they could hardly, in the real sense, return...what they suffered there warped them into permanent outsiders...” (qtd. in Said xvi). It becomes apparent that Dickens had employed the historical reality of the times, for instance through Magwitch, who according to the imperial law was prohibited from repatriation. Said argues:

The prohibition placed on Magwitch's return is not only penal but imperial: subjects can be taken to places like Australia, but they cannot be allowed a 'return' to metropolitan space, which...is meticulously charted, spoken for, inhabited by a hierarchy of metropolitan personages (*Culture* xvii).

Seen in such a perspective, *Great Expectations* with its multiple instances of the imperial socio-cultural order no longer remains a mere work of art; through its production of a certain kind of knowledge in relation to the contemporary reality of the times, the novel may then be looked upon as a text that conforms to the imperial culture. The characterisation of Magwitch or Pip then ceases to remain a fictional necessity, apparently innocent creations of the author; in the aftermath of decolonisation scholars and readers have been able to present the other side of the story – a contrapuntal reading of the conventional structures to locate in them the workings of an imperial political worldview that served the purposes of the Empire.

14.6 SUMMING UP: FRAMES FOR RE-READING

With the decline of the Empire, the non-white, non-European cultures appear to be empowered – a need has now arisen in the contemporary world to look for other substitutes for imperialism while accepting the presence of 'other' societies and cultures. These societies and cultures too possess their own voices and texts which need to be recognised. It is in such a context that the act of contrapuntal reading – the task of re-reading the canon - holds significance because it is through such endeavours that “[f]or the first time, the history of imperialism and its culture can now be studied as neither monolithic nor reductively compartmentalised, separate, distinct” (xxiii). It is therefore within the critical field of postcolonial theory that the critic may engage with a re-reading of canon while looking at these not merely as pure literatures with universal values but as by-products of a distinct social, political and cultural ideology in relation to the specific historical context of its production. Contrapuntal reading forms one of the most significant strategies in postcolonial

reading practices and also constitutes a fundamental aspect of literary criticism. Contextual engagement with a text involves –

- i) The recognition of the process through which contexts are either made ‘present’ or ‘absent’ in a specific work.
- ii) Analysing the ways in which the text itself appears to mediate the contemporary discussions and conform to or challenge the dominant ideology.

Given such a perspective, Said’s reading of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* as discussed above reveals that the critic in Said looks at the text as a “mediation [that doesn’t] passively reflect the world but actively interrogate it, take up various positions in relation to prevailing views, resist or critique dominant ways of seeing it” (McLeod 144). However, this is not to say that works of art ought to be read within their colonial contexts solely while looking at them as representative of the corrupt practices of imperialist ideology. Such approaches deprive the texts of their innate value within the world of literature and overlook the fact that the texts also engage in ‘questioning’ colonial ideology. Thus, Said’s frames for re-reading the canon may be considered as his attempt to not only uncover “how they confirm dominant perspectives, but how they might be read as challenging these views”. Indeed, Said offers his contrapuntal reading “to uncover emergent, counter-colonialist positions...by underlining the ways in which colonialism has been subverted” (McLeod 157).



14.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Mention some of the important books authored by Edward Said.
2. On what ground does Said say that texts are ‘worldly’?
3. How does Said engage with the act of re-reading?
4. In what ways did Foucault help Said to develop his approach of ‘contrapuntal’ reading?

5. Discuss Said's re-reading of *Great Expectations*.
6. Examine the relationship between knowledge and power.



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