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(Under CBCS)

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Paper: ENG 4056
LITERARY THEORY



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Block- I

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UNIT- 1

RUSSIAN FORMALISM

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1.1 Objectives

Originating in the work of OPOYAZ and the Moscow Linguistic Circle, Russian Formalism is one of the most influential critical movements of the 20th century. This unit is designed to familiarize you with the major figures as well as the concepts central to Russian Formalism. By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- *understand* Russian Formalism in the context of the changing critical scenario in Russia,
- *identify* the major figures of the movement as well as assess their contribution,

- *explore* the concepts expounded by the contributors to the movement,
- *assess* the contribution of the formalists to subsequent critical/theoretical development.

1.2 Historical Background

The second decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence of two groups of literary thinkers and linguists: “Moscow Linguistic Circle” and the OPOYAZ often known as the “Society for the Study of Poetic Language”. The former group was formed in the capital city of Russia in 1915. It was founded by the eminent linguist and scholar Roman Jakobson. The other members of the group were Grigory Vinokur, Peter Bogatynev, Osip Brik and Boris Tomashevsky. OPOYAZ was formed in St. Petersburg in 1916. Victor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynjanov, Boris Eikhenbaum and Victor Vinogradov belonged to this group. We must remember that the term ‘formalist’ was initially applied pejoratively to the literary scholars and critics associated with these two literary circles of Russia. These Russian critics, if separated into two different groups, were nevertheless associated in much of their intellectual effort. Their intellectual co-operation gave birth to several volumes of essays, titled “Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language” (1916-23).

Although initially used in a derogatory sense, ‘formalist’ was a neutral designation to a group of thinkers in later times. Leading thinkers of post-revolutionary Russia such as Lunacharsky, Bukharin, and Trotsky repudiated the formalist project for its adherence to the formal aspects at the cost of its wider historical and social dimensions. In fact, the formalists hardly reconciled formalist and stylistic analysis with wider socio-historical issues until Mikhail Bakhtin entered the critical arena.

Stop to Consider:

It is important to note that two major influences in 20th century criticism were Russian Formalism and the findings of Mikhail Bakhtin. Though not a formalist, Bakhtin linked question of literary genres and language to larger issues of ideology, class and subversion. For Bakhtin, like the formalists, language was a key concern, but his concept of language has a much wider sociological dimension. For instance, he sees language as a site for ideological struggle and social intercourse.

Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th century, sociological considerations were dominant in the critical climate of Russia. Russian critics dwelt extensively on literature's connections with issues of social well-being. Perhaps, the most important critic in the 19th century, Vissarioni Belinsky (1811-48), maintained that literature should contribute to social betterment while at the same time remaining artistic. Social usefulness of literature was also asserted by Nikolay Chernyshevsky who believed that art could be an instrument for the transformation of social reality. Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836-1861) even maintained that social and political demands should overshadow the aesthetic in literature. Dmitry Pisarev (1840-68) was an iconoclast and had extreme views on this issue: for instance, he denounced Pushkin because his works, he opined, were useless as they are harmful to social progress.

Pushkin and Gogol were at the centre-stage of critical debate in the mid-19th century. Pavel Anenkov brought out Pushkin's works and tried to defend the autonomy of art and the dualistic ideal of the artistic and the political against the monistic doctrines of the Russian critics. Anenkov's intellectual ally was Alexander Druzhinin (1824-64) who flouted art's social commitment and said

that the socially beneficial role of art was only possible when it ceased to be art's principal aim.

Anenkov, Druzhinin and their associates were recognized as 'aesthetic' critics and their 'radical' counterparts were Chernyshevsky, Dobrolynov, and Pisarev, among others. Tolstoy, in his "What is Art?" took a position akin to the radicals. However, he pleads for a literature that can infuse Christian ideals into the readers and thus unite people. Tolstoy's notion of 'committed art' does not have the sharp political edge of the radical critics like Dobrolynov, but he shares their basic assumption about art's commitment to social good.

After the controversy between the radical and aesthetic critics subsided, the populists appeared on the critical scene. The populists saw peasantry as the potential force for the revolutionary transformation of society. Hence, they saw literature as part of a wider political programme. The most important critics from this school were Nikolay KonstantinovichMikheylovsky (1842-1904). Mikheylovsky wrote articles on major Russian writers— Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Mikhail Saltykov- Shchedrin and Chekhov. He even denounced Dostoevsky for his lack of social ideal.

SAQ:

Would you agree with the view that strong focus on the 'social' aspect of a work of art leads to a loss of aesthetic merit? (80 words)

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Russian Formalism thus can be seen as an effect of this long-standing critical debate. Historical and social dimensions of art are flouted and extra-textual yardsticks are pushed aside. Agreement is reached on the issue of what should be the proper object of literary criticism. Before 'formalism', literary analysis was not a discipline by itself but part of academic research. Besides the conventional scholars like Alexander Veselovsky, there were the symbolists who transposed literary critical discourse from the academy into the journals. The Symbolists offered a highly subjective and impressionistic mode of criticism, drawing largely on the French symbolists. The Formalists entered the scene with a reaction against the subjectivism of the symbolists, pleading for a scientific mode of literary study. They sought to emulate the models and methods of science and resorted to scientific positivism. Boris Eikhenbaum, a leading formalist critic, sees formalists isolating literature from politics and ideology as expressive of a revolutionary attitude.

Initially, the formalists offered a distinctive view of language, and underlined the distinctiveness of literary language in contrast to the language of ordinary discourse. Then we see theorizing about verse and the study of narrative plot. It was during this time that the distinction between plot and story was extensively examined. Russian Formalism was paralleled by Anglo-American New Criticism with their views of literary text as autonomous entity and hence, the proper object of study. Initially the Europeans were unaware of the Formalist school. It was only later that Roman Jakobson went to New York and formalist works began to be translated into English. Thus, 'formalism' began to attract the attention of the English-speaking world. Hence, the 'formalists' affinity with New Criticism was not a matter of influence but that of convergence.

Stop to Consider:

Russian Formalism Versus New Criticism:

We will discuss in the next unit of this block the affinities and the differences between Russian Formalism and New Criticism. It is pertinent to note here an important observation from *Modern Literary Theory*: “Although Russian Formalism is often likened to American New Criticism because of their similar emphasis on ‘close reading’, the Russian Formalists regarded themselves as developers of a science of criticism and were more interested in the discovery of a systematic method for the analysis of poetic texts. Russian Formalism emphasized a differential definition of literature as opposed to the New Critical isolation and objectification of the single text; they were also more emphatic in their rejection of the mimetic/expressive account of the text. Indeed, Russian Formalism rejected entirely the idea of the text as reflecting an essential unity which is ultimately one of moral or humanistic significance. The central focus of this analysis was not so much literature per se but literariness, that which makes a given text ‘literary’.”

You can understand from this an important difference between the two movements—the separate assumptions about a literary text. The New Critics were more likely to accept a text as “literary” based on derived notions of genre. The Russian Formalists would however seek to explore the status of the text with regard to prevailing notions of what the text stood for.

1.3 Important Figures

1.3.1 Roman Jakobson

Roman Jakobson is a vital link between structuralism and linguistics. His life-long research was mainly directed towards the

relation between language and literature. Jakobson held that literary research and the study of linguistics should go hand-in-hand. Let us, in this context, note that one of his most important essays that propounded 'formalist' preoccupation with 'literariness' is "Linguistics and Poetics."

He was born in Russia in 1896 and died in the USA in 1982. He entered Moscow University in 1914, completed his study at the University of Prague and taught at Masaryk University from 1935 till the Nazi occupation in 1939. In 1939, he fled to Scandinavia, then immigrated to the USA in 1941 and taught at Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes (1942-46) among many other educational institutes.

Jakobson founded Moscow Linguistic circle in 1915 and was also associated with the OPOYAZ. He founded the 'Prague Linguistic Circle' where he started an engagement with Ferdinand de Saussure's work. He was also associated with the founding of the Linguistic Circle of New York after he moved to America.

Stop to Consider:

Moscow Linguistic Circle & OPOYAZ:

The founding of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915 provided an unprecedented forum for research into the relations of literature and language, since such research had remained outside the scope of the neo-grammarians' linguistics then dominating language studies. The work of the circle promoted research into prosody, myth and both traditional and contemporary folklore. Jakobson counted among his collaborators and friends many leading avant-garde poets and painters. The close affiliation of the circle with the Petrograd-based OPOYAZ provided a context in which scholarly and historical research proceeded hand-in-hand with contemporary literature.

Jakobson held the view that poetics cannot be separated from linguistics and that poetic elements are object of linguistic scouting. Incorporating the concepts of synchrony and diachrony, he explains that literary study is concerned with elements of the literary text that persist at a given point of time, as well as with changes occurring in a tradition or a system over time. However, Jakobson's contribution to the formalist movement lies in the analysis of 'literariness'. He attempted to define what makes a verbal message a work of art in linguistic terms. 'Literariness' was a major concern for the formalists from the very beginning of the movement. In "Linguistics and Poetics" Jakobson explored this fundamental 'formalist' idea using a wide range of illustration and example. Closely linked to this concept is a theory of poetry. Jakobson identifies metaphor and metonymy as two fundamental ways of organizing discourse.

1.3.2 Yuri Tynyanov

Born in Latvia, Tynyanov graduated from Petrograd University in 1918. Besides his identity as a 'formalist' critic, Tynyanov was also regarded as an authority on Pushkin. The question of what counts as literature and what does not was a constant pre-occupation among the 'formalists'. If Jacobson and Shklovsky expounded 'literariness' and 'defamiliarisation' as an answer to the problem of the division between what is literary and what is ordinary, Tynyanov's argument was that a text being 'literary' depended on its relationship with both literary and extra-literary orders. His concept of a literary system is that a text may be literary and non-literary depending on the nature of the literary systems within which it is set. An important offshoot of such a position is the notion of literature's relative status and the negation of the concept of tradition as an integrated system as found in this statement: "Tradition, the basic concept of an established history of literature, has proved to be an unjustifiable

abstraction of one or more of the literary elements of a given system within which they occupy the same plane and play the same role. They are equated with the like elements of another system in which they are on a different plain, thus they are brought into a seemingly unified, fictitiously integrated system.” (Tony Bennett)

The initial position of the ‘formalists’ was aesthetic and historical. They pleaded for the study of devices and techniques which account for the literariness of a given work of art. By 1924, literary study introduced a systematic, functional and dynamic perspective; and it started with Tynyanov. The most distinguished work of Tynyanov was *Theses on Language*- a collaborative work with Jakobson. The points made here are important for the ‘formalist’ movement.

1. Literary study must be carried on rigorously on a theoretical basis using precise terminology.
2. Within a particular form in literature (such as poetry) structural laws must be established before it is related to other fields.
3. Study of literary history must be systematic and ‘evidences’ must be analyzed attending on how they work within the system.
4. A system is not assemblage of all contemporary phenomena; it involves a hierarchy of which elements can be situated.

1.3.3 Victor Shklovsky

Victor Shklovsky was another major figure closely associated with Russian Formalism. He is known in modern literary criticism for the concept of ‘defamiliarization’— a dominant concern of this school.

Born in St. Petersburg in 1893, Shklovsky completed his education at the University of St. Petersburg. In 1923, he moved to Germany

to settle there permanently. There he published two novels: *A Sentimental Journey* (1923) and *Zoo* (1923). He came back to Russia and started serious engagement with literary criticism. As a result, his two critical works—*On the Theory of Prose* (1925) and *The Technique of the Writer's Craft* (1928) came out. As it happened to writers of that period in Russia, he was under pressure from Soviet authorities. He attempted to adopt 'socialist realism'—the official doctrine in literary culture in post-revolutionary Russia. Echoes of such an undertaking can be heard in essays such as "Movements to a Scholarly Error" (1930). Shklovsky was appointed as a commissar in the Russian army during the war. Literary criticism and biographies written by Shklovsky centred on such writers as Lawrence Sterne, Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Shklovsky is perhaps best known for his work *On the Theory of Prose*, where he offers a poetics of prose fiction. His earlier writings show a close link between Russian Formalism and futurism. In essays like "Resurrection of the Word" (1914) he upholds the idea of things in their sensuousness against the mystificatory poetics of symbolism. It was a radical attitude that invited a certain kind of poetry and marked a conspicuous break with conventional poetry. Whereas the futurist rejects bourgeois good taste and common sense, characteristic of traditional poetry, Shklovsky pleads for innovation and experimentation in art—the ways in which true perception can be achieved as against the automatized perception of everyday life. Shklovsky's works include *Mayakovsky and his Circle* (1941), *Third Factory* (1926), *Leo Tolstoy* (1963), *Knight's Move* (1923) and *Energy of Delusion: A Book on Plot*.

SAQ:

Would you agree with the appellation of “journalist” ascribed to this group of thinkers? Do their concerns focus on form (or structure and genre) or on language, or a combination of both?
(30+60 words)

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1.3.4 Boris Tomashevsky

Tomashevsky graduated from the University of Liege and took a degree in electrical engineering. He studied 17th and 18th century French poetry at Sorbonne. He also studied Russian philology at St. Petersburg University and joined ‘OPOYAZ’ in 1918. From the mid 1920s he taught poetics and stylistics at Leningrad University. In 1930s he was forced to give up teaching but in his last years he was allowed to resume teaching at the university where he also prepared some of his works on poetics and stylistics.

Tomashevsky played an important role at the ‘OPOYAZ’ by developing a theory of versification. He wrote *Russian Versification. Metrics* and articles like “The problem of verse rhythm”, “Verse and Rhythm”, the “Rhythm of the Four Foot Iamb based on observation of Eugene Onegin”, “the Five Foot Iamb in Pushkin”, etc. *Russian Versification. Metrics* is a concise introduction to the problems of Russian versification defining poetic speech as speech organized in its phonetic aspect and concentrating on the role of stress and intonation in the metric division of verse. But he also saw the need to investigate the interrelations between

intonation and syntax, sound and semantics, thus paving the way for the functional approach to the study of metrics.

1.4 Key Concepts

Going back to Matthew Arnold, we find him proclaiming that the greatness of a work of art depends on the greatness of action. With such proclamations, Arnold emphasized the importance of the ‘content’ of literature. In stark contrast, the Russian Formalists were pre-occupied with the question of form. The questions they raised and resolved were, in a way, more important: what makes a work of literature ‘artistic’ and ‘literary’; what is the object of literary and critical study? How is the study of artistry of a given work related to language? Let us now discuss some of the key concerns of the ‘formalists’.

1.4.1 Literariness

The Formalist critics were preoccupied with the artistic/literary quality of a given work. For them, ‘literariness’ elicits the distinction between literary language and the language of practical discourse. Roman Jakobson held the view that the object of literary study is not literature per se, but ‘literariness’, that is to say, the sum of special linguistic and formal properties that distinguish literary texts from non literary texts.

As ‘poetic’ language focuses on the ‘message’ for its own sake, a verbal message, on the other hand, calls attention to itself. Consequently, the relation between sign and its referent is disturbed. We must understand that ‘poetic’ function is not confined to poetry only. It points to any verbal message that foregrounds the signs more than making them a vehicle for meaning. However, that

‘poetic’ function, to Jakobson, is not all about the ‘palpability of signs’, but also suggests a basic organizing principle underlying all verbal discourse. Jakobson says, “poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into that of combination.” In poetry, a particular word is selected from among a stock of equivalent words (synonyms, autonyms etc.) The chosen words are then combined not according to the grammatical rule of combination, but according to the same principle of equivalence. Along the axis of combination, this equivalence is created through various means such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, parallelism, or other rhetorical devices. These two ways of organizing verbal discourse are likened to metaphor and metonymy.

Jakobson not merely expounds the metaphoric and metonymic principles, but tries to understand different ‘genres’ and types of literary work in these terms. Poetry exhibits the principle of metaphor whereas metonymic principle is the very heart of prose literature. Thus, we can see that the issue of literariness marginalizes the content element of a given work of art. What is worth discussion, to the formalist, is not the ‘what’ but the ‘how’ of literature.

Stop to Consider:

In order to understand the distinction between ‘practical’ and ‘poetic’ language, we must see how Jakobson formulates the functions of language. Language is not merely a means of communication. Jakobson describes six functions of language schematizing six elements of linguistic communication in this way:

addresser

message

addressee

context

contact

code

In a verbal communication, the 'addresser' sends a 'message' to the 'addressee'. The message is placed in specific 'context' and sent through a physical channel (Contact). Both the addresser and the addressee may use a common 'code'. To each of these six factors of verbal communication is attached a particular function of language. For instance, 'referential function' is linked to the context while 'emotive function' indicates the predominance of the addresser. So these functions can be schematized in this way:

Emotive

Poetic

Conative

Referential

Phatic

Metalingual

Emotive: It focuses on the addresser and conveys the speaker's attitude

Poetic: It focuses on the message and makes verbal signs palpable.

Conative: it is oriented towards the addressee. It consists in the vocative and imperative use of language.

Referential: It consists in what the message 'means' or 'denotes'.

Phatic: It implies those messages that establish or prolong communication as social connection.

Metalingual: Its focus is language itself, instead of denoting object or events or expressing attitude.

1.4.2 Form

The 'Formalists' were manifestly oriented towards form. If there can be dispute over meaning and scope of the term, we can say that 'form' includes all formal aspects, compositional elements, constitutive principles, as well as the rhetorical devices that go into the making of a literary text. The neo-classical critics defined form as a combination of component elements according to the principle of decorum. Coleridge upholds 'organic form' that develops from the very heart of the creative process like a growing plant, where the parts are inseparably related to the whole.

The New Critics use the term 'structure' synonymously with 'form'. It implies a paradoxical relationship of elements that gives rise to tension and ambiguity and all taken together constitute the totality of meaning. What prevailed throughout the different phases of critical tradition is the form/content dichotomy. (The Marxists, however, argue that it is the content that determines the form and not the other way round.). The 'formalists' resist the idea that form is a container or an envelope. Instead, they define form as something concrete, dynamic and self-contained. Form determines structure and meaning. Even 'form' is itself understood as 'content'.

To the New Critics, form is by itself, not important; formal aspects are important as they are decisive to the understanding of a poem. The Formalists in contrast, do not go beyond form because it is the ultimate 'telos' of literary pursuit. Insisting on the distinction between literary and practical language, they emphasize that neither the referential function of language nor its mimetic relation to reality is essential to literature where the signs do not refer to an external signified. A text foregrounds its formal aspects and marginalizes the referential function.

Hence, it is the form that remains to be studied as the proper object of literary study.

1.4.3 Fabula and Syuzhet

One important area for the formalists to explore was the language of prose fiction. The concepts of 'fabula' and 'syuzhet' are explained by Boris Tomashevsky. The *Dictionary of Narratology* however, defines fabula as 'the set of narrated situations and events in their chronological sequence'. Syuzhet implies a logical ordering of events and situations. In fact, it is the content/form or material/device opposition that gets translated into the fabula/syuzhet division.

Fabula is a straightforward account of event and situations. Ordering of which has nothing to do with the artistic effect to arouse suspense. Syuzhet, on the other hand is the artistic re-arrangement of the representational elements. How can we then make a distinction between fictional language and ordinary language? Tomashevsky asserts that more than a difference in language, it is a difference of presentation. How does a detective novel work, for instance? It manipulates the fable with a certain artistic aim in view: a certain of maximum amount of suspense. The artistic effect of a fictional narrative depends on how the content elements are unfolded, manipulated, and hence 'defamiliarized'.

Similarly, Shklovsky elaborates the story/plot distinction. The story is the basic succession of events that the artist is disposed to. Plot is the distinctive way in which the story is organized so as to defamiliarise the familiar materials. Plot, therefore, has to do with the 'form' of a novel, the 'how' of its telling, like rhythm in poetry. (Shklovsky finds in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* an archetype of the novel, in which the focus is not on the story per se, but on story-

telling). As syuzhet (or plot) works upon the Fabula (or story), and ‘defamiliarize’ familiar material, one fabula can give rise to a number of syuzhets.

Such a formulation is also akin to structuralism. This story/plot dichotomy was carried forward by structuralists and subsumed in their theories of narrative. Vladimir Propp is an important link between these two movements. Propp was greatly inspired by the distinction between fabula and syuzhet, and his *Morphology of the Folktale* is evident manifestation of formalist influence. Here, Propp studies many Russian folktales and fairy-tales and reveals that underlying all of them there is only one story. The individual tales (syuzhet) are variations upon a basic fabula.

Stop to Consider:

Morphology of the Folktale by Vladimir Propp, is a major contribution to ‘formalism’ as well as an important step towards the poetics of fictional narrative. Narrative, Propp says, is characterized by its syntactic structuring. He sees narrative not in terms of character but as constituted by ‘functions’ that the characters have within the plot. Propp identifies certain functions that confer uniformity on the tales. He concludes that a character is attached to a certain function. The functions are distinguishable and they are constant elements independent of their agent. The number of functions Propp distinguishes are thirty-one.

He also concluded that all the characters could be resolved into only 7 broad character types in the 100 tales he analyzed:

The villain — struggles against the hero.

The donor — prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.

The (magical) helper — helps the hero in the quest.

The princess and her father — give the task to the hero, identify the false hero, princess marries the hero, often sought for during the narrative. Propp noted that functionally, the princess and the father cannot be clearly distinguished.

The dispatcher — character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.

The hero or victim/seeker hero — reacts to the donor, weds the princess.

[False hero] — takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess. (www.wikipedia.com)

In a particular fairy tale, one character might be involved in more than one sphere of action. In the same vein many characters can be involved in a single action.

Such an analysis of Propp's ideas regarding Russian folktales may help in your understanding of Russian Formalism to a considerable extent. This is rigorous analysis at its abstract best: the cultural elements, as associated with mythical ideas of doom, evil, power, weakness, etc., is left aside. The focus is on elements of the construction of the narrative. The characters or figures in the folktales are seen as signifiers or as coded functions. The various combinations give us the syuzhet.

1.4.4 Formalism and 'Literary History'

The idea that 'formalists' are pre-occupied with the concepts of form, devices and technique would have us believe that formalists view literature synchronically. The formalist notion of form not only explains the 'literariness' of art at a given point of time, it also explains historical change. A particular form is valid only until

when it can retain its artistic effectiveness, or can defamiliarize. When the form loses its artistic effect, it is regarded as outmoded and is pushed to the background. A new form emerges to impede the reader's familiar perception, not to express new content. Thus, literary history is a service of the substitution of literary forms and defamiliarizing devices cater to shifting artistic sensibilities of readers.

SAQ:

How do literary forms reflect cultural changes? Do you think that the Russian Formalists gave enough attention to this problem? (75 words)

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History, to the formalist, does not have unity, coherence or purpose. It is also not development, because it does not replace any artistic form with a developed one, because all forms are equally artistic at the specific periods of their use. As history involves substitution of forms, it is never a peaceful or continuous process. Instead, it involves struggle of old and new values, as well as competition between various schools. Of course, this history has nothing to do with the history of a particular person; we can quote Boris Eichenbaum in this context, - "For us, the central problem of the history of literature is the problem of evolution without personality the study of literature as a self-formed social phenomenon".

1.4.5 Defamiliarization

Defamiliarization as expounded by Shklovsky is a theory about artistic perception. When we are accustomed to an image, idea or a phenomenon, the perceptive effort is reduced. Art defamiliarizes images, ideas or situations which are otherwise familiar to us and thus impede our perception. Art and literature assume significance only against the backdrop of ordinary habitual perception. Devices to achieve defamiliarization are not eternal, but are time-bound. When they cease to dehabituate our perception, they lose validity. Therefore, defamiliarization implies perpetual change in literary tradition.

An important reason why the Formalists were so much occupied with the formal aspects of literature or the literary devices that make a work 'literary' was the assumption that form determines content; the formal devices defamiliarize the content elements. Let us look at how Tony Bennett puts it in *Formalism and Marxism*: "the formalists sought to reveal the devices through which the total structure of given works of literature might be said to defamiliarize, make strange or challenge certain dominant conceptions ideologies even, although they did not use the word of the social world." You must, therefore, be aware of the fact that defamiliarization is, in a broader sense, not just a set of literary devices; it is also a mode of representation that has a subversive potential. This subversion can be a subversion of already existing literary genre, ideology, or a dominant perception prevalent at a particular point of time. If we look at twentieth century avant-garde literary practices, (consider, for instance, the works of James Joyce and Franz Kafka) they subvert, through their own unique mode of representation, the realistic trend of the nineteenth-century novel. Kafka makes strange the familiar world that was so plausibly delineated in a Victorian novel.

Check Your Progress:

1. Give a brief sketch of the critical concerns of the Russian Formalists with regard to ideas of language and the role of metaphors in language.
2. Describe the works of the Russian Formalists with special reference to their ideas of 'form' and 'content'. Explain their stand in contradistinction to that of the New Critics.
3. Highlight the contributions of the Russian Formalists to literary theory with reference to their ideas touching upon the role of art, the special status of poetic language and the relation of art to social reality.

1.5 Summing Up

How do we then understand the Formalist view of literature? Firstly, they held that if we want to find out what is specific to a given literary work, we must examine its formal properties. So, it is not necessary to consider how large the historical and social factors are in shaping a literary work. Secondly, the formalists resisted the mimetic theory of literature which propounded literature as the result of imitation of reality. A literary text does not reflect reality but defamiliarizes our perception of reality. In other words, it does not reflect the real world but signifies it through its inherent semiotic process.

After post-structuralism, the basic formalist assumption that there is something distinctive about literary language and that it differs substantially from ordinary uses of language has been contested. The possibility of multiple meanings is not a specific property of literary language but a common trait in any language. Again, such diverse trends as pos-colonialism, feminism, neo-historicism are all

in indifferent ways reactions against the formalist's exclusive focus on the insularity of the literary text.

What is of lasting influence in formalism is their linking of literary study with linguistic investigation. In subsequent critical trends the question of language has become an issue of paramount importance although different critical school study different aspects and questions such as gender, power, subjectivity and so on. These are all conducted through an acute investigation of language.

1.6 References and Suggested Readings

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UNIT- 2

STRUCTURALISM

Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives**
- 2.2 Historical Background**
 - 2.2.1 Non-Intellectual Background**
 - 2.2.2 Intellectual Background**
- 2.3 What is Structuralism?**
- 2.4 Key Concepts**
- 2.5 Key Theorists of Structuralism**
- 2.6 Structuralism and Narratology**
- 2.7 Summing Up**
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings**

2.1 Objectives

In this unit we will try to discuss Structuralism so that you can see for yourself how the intellectual world of the twentieth century preoccupied itself with the idea of finding out ways in literary studies with the help of an interdisciplinary approach.

However, after going through this unit we claim that you will be able to—

- *see* for yourself what does the term ‘structure’ mean
- *formulate* the notion of Structuralism as a theoretical trend
- *find* out about Structuralism as an approach to literature
- *trace* the unique historical and intellectual background out of which it emerged.

2.2 Historical Background

A study of the historical background of both Structuralism and Post-structuralism provides scope for a better understanding of the two terms. It is because they cannot be isolated from their own specific socio-political and literary backgrounds. For your understanding we have two units in which we will try to locate the history behind their emergence.

2.2.1 Non-Intellectual Background

While reading such theories we are not sure whether we should read them as diagnosis of an epoch with social reality as its referent or as a radical turn against the entire process of representation and the referent. The twentieth century saw the instability of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed object, the reader and the text, the past and the present. Questionings of received ideas of form haunt the critical writings of the modernist thinkers. Debates about tradition and rejection of tradition, about the use and interpretation of history, and about the very survival and the value of the written word have taken on a renewed urgency as modernism evolved into a variety of postmodernism. It is against such a background that we can think of the emergence, strength and relevance of structuralism and post structuralism as theoretical trends. Because, going against tradition, they really changed the ways of conceptualizations and representations.

2.2.2 Intellectual Background

In the West, the beginning of structuralism can mostly be anticipated in the works of the Canadian thinker Northrop Fry whose being the most influential theorist of America hastened the

emergence of something called “Myth Criticism” functional in between 1940-1960. Drawing on the findings of anthropology and psychology regarding universal myths, rituals, and folktales; these critics were trying to restore the spiritual values to a world they saw as alienated, fragmented and commonly ruled by scientism, empiricism, positivism, and technology. In their view, myths were created as integral to human thought and believed that literature too emerged out of a collective effort on the part of various cultures and groups to establish a meaningful context of human existence. Northrop Fry’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) emphasized on the point that criticism should be scientific, objective and systematic discipline. Fry’s models which exhibited recurrent patterns, is later shared by Structuralist views of language and literature.

However, Structuralism can be said to have formally begun with the *Course in General Linguistics*, a series of lectures delivered by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) at the University of Geneva. Although published posthumously in 1960, this book provided a new definition of the ‘object of linguistics’. Saussure divided, what we call language, into two parts-*langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). The reason was to show that ‘language has its own potentials’ and that it can exist ‘outside the individual’ who can never create or modify it by himself. Language is a self authenticating system and is not supposed to be determined by the physical world. Whatever we see in language is simply the connection of a meaning to a particular sound-image. This is what provides Saussure with a scope to define Semiology.

About **Semiology**, Saussure said:

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it Semiology.

But any attempt to understand the intellectual background is never complete without the reference to New Criticism and Russian Formalism two of the most significant theoretical trends provided grounds for the future development of structuralism.

The New Critics of the 1930s focused on the meaning of a literary text. Both the New Criticism of the United States and Practical Criticism of United Kingdom opted for providing 'interpretations'. The New Critics paid a particular attention to the formal aspects of literature, which they believed, contributed largely to its meaning and their attempt at 'close reading' made their effort easier. In his book *Practical Criticism*, I. A. Richards claimed that, "All respectable poetry invites close reading." Gradually, this motto became important for every new critic as they could finally understand the point that with the help of irony, paradox, ambiguity, and complexity each word of a poem could be scrutinized in detail with regard to all its denotations and connotations.

Simultaneously with the New Critics, during the first half of the twentieth century, the literary theorist of Russia (Please refer to Unit III of Block I to know more about Russian Formalism) and Czechoslovakia developed a theory of 'literariness'. They argued that it was 'literariness' that differentiated literary texts from other forms of writings like an advertisement, or a newspaper article. Dealing with this they focused on the formal aspect of literature and the sort of language it employed. The Russian Formalists suggested that what makes the language of literature different from non-literary language is the employment of a range of devices that produce a defamiliarising effect. Later, they turned towards the more specific functions of those devices. Borrowing much from the Russian Formalists, the Prague Structuralists began to see a literary text as a structure of differences. Finally, a literary text differs from

other texts because of its orientation towards itself, its own form and not towards any outside sources.

However, the most pertinent issue underlying such an intercontinental background of Structuralism, is a new awareness of the ways of receiving literary works. Structuralism challenges some of the most cherished beliefs of the common readers. Going against the assumption that the text is a place where we can form a communion with the author's thoughts and feelings, structuralism has finally established that the author is 'dead'. In their ahistorical approach, New Criticism, Structuralism and Russian Formalism together deemphasized and ignored literature's involvement in the ideological projection of its place and time.

Check Your Progress

1. Name the major trends with collectively made structuralism a dominant theoretical approach?
2. Relate Structuralism with New Criticism and Russian Formalism
3. What do you mean by New Critical 'close reading'?
4. Why do you think a kind of 'literariness' became important for Russian Formalism?

A meticulous attempt to locate Post-structuralism in its background has been made in the next unit. The history of post-structuralism has much to do with structuralism itself. It is because post-structuralism began partly as continuation of and partly as the reaction against structuralism. Hence, we cannot but accept the fact that the premises and findings of structuralism established the future grounds for post-structuralism.

2.3 What is Structuralism?

Structuralism is a particular approach to literature and other cultural forms, which flourished in France during 1960s. It assumes that any cultural phenomenon can be described by probing the basic structural principle underlying the phenomenon.

Structuralism began in the works of Levi Strauss and Roland Barthes. It comes with the proposition that things cannot be understood in isolation; meanings do not reside in the things themselves. Meaning is not the *essence* of a thing. It is the outcome of a structure.

What are its implications for criticism and for the study of culture? Structuralism rejects the basic tenets of mimetic criticism or literary realism which looks into the correspondence between literary text and external reality. Structuralism also rejects romantic expressivist criticism that values a text in terms of its link with the emotions and creative imagination of its author. In contrast, it undertakes, through the study of a text, to arrive at the underlying structure/system or principles that gives a text a definite set of meanings. In this way, structuralism posits structure as the *telos* of literary investigation.

Structuralism begins with the concepts developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in his path-breaking work *Course in General Linguistics* (1916).

2.4 Key Concepts:

Language is not just a system of nomenclature neither is it simply what we *say*. Language, he contends, has two aspects to it: *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is the basic underlying system that governs a language and *parole* is its manifestation in its actual speech situation. Though an individual can master a language and use it, it

exists beyond him/her. So, we must have a system in place, before we attempt to generate and communicate meaning through speech and writing, or, in simple words, before we effectively communicate through language. (So, ask yourself: which is important—system/structure or an isolated instance of language use?)

Let's move on to the next question: what is a structure? To get an answer, we need to elaborate Saussure's concept of linguistic sign.

For one thing, Saussure's concept of language differs from pre-existing ideas on language. It is a common tradition to connect language to some pre-existing reality, or sign as expression of emotional states. Saussure discards the view of language as a list of sign, and says it is basically a sign system that gives meaning to a particular sound image. What, then, is a sign, according to Saussure? A sign is not the relation between a word and a thing. A sign, in contrast, has two components: signifier and signified. Signifier and signified are psychological entity that has to do with nothing but the linguistic faculty of the interlocutor.

What is the structuralist implication of the notion of sign as psychological entity? If we see sign as having a link with tangible reality, the study of language would invariably require a corresponding study of empirical reality without which our study of language would be incomplete. By insisting on the psychological aspect of language, Saussure paves the way for later structuralists to see a text as an independent realm governed by its own structural principles. Now, language is an autonomous realm, analyzable in its own terms.

Saussure put forth a crucial proposition regarding the link between signifier and signified. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE SIGNIFIER AND THE SIGNIFIED IS ARBITRARY. There is no logical, existential link between them.

What does it imply? Let us, for a moment, assume that their link is quite logical and natural. Then the word 'cat' would mean an actual animal in all situations, and everywhere. The word 'cat' would become an unquestionable scientific fact. There is no necessity of structural principle to justify its meaning. Now, ask yourself: does the word mean the same animal in all linguistic communities? It doesn't (Now, read the previous paragraph again).

Let's move on to a related question: what is it that makes the word 'cat' denote a specific variety of animal in English language. or, why is a cat a cat? A cat is a cat because in English language we have other terms as well that denote different kinds of animal, such as dog, elephant, bear, deer, horse, and so on. It is the existence of different related terms that assures the meaning of a particular signifier. The meaning of a particular signifier is assured when it is placed within the language as a whole. We have dismantled the traditional atomistic view of meaning according to which each and every linguistic unit in a particular language is endowed with a certain *meaning*.

Now, we have understood that meaning of signifier depends on the simultaneous existence of other signifiers. But this is not the whole story. Meaning is intrinsically related to the relation of that particular signifier to the other signifiers. So, meaning is *relational*. What kind of relation? Is it a relation of similarity? No. Saussure says that it is differential. Meaning of a sign is generated through its differential relations to other signs.

Now ask yourself again: why is a cat a cat? Now we have an answer: a cat is cat because it is not rat or mat.

This difference is a principle, a feature, an aspect of language as a system. Thus, 'difference' here points to the systemic nature of language. We have in all language a system of minimal difference,

or binary oppositions - 'tin' is different from 'kin' because of a minimal phonetic difference of /t/ and /k/--something that enables the term 'tin' denote a specific meaning.

Saussure also expounds another important aspect of language: syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of linguistic sign. What are they?

All the linguistic signs in a given event cannot yield meaning simultaneously (When you read anything—be it a novel, story or a poem—you cannot read all at once; you have to read in a linear fashion, moving from one linguistic sign to another, and so on). They are positioned in a linear fashion and hence their unfolding is sequential that involves passage of time.

For instance, look at the sentence: the boy kicked the girl. It is an event which becomes meaningful after its completion, and words are here positioned in a sequence. A sign can mean something only with respect to what precedes and follows it. It is the syntagmatic aspect of language (You must notice that the words follow a particular order of how they should be arranged horizontally to mean something. You cannot break this syntagmatic rule and write something like: 'Kicked the girl boy the').

On the other hand, every word in a sentence is selected out of a stock of similar (or opposite) words. For instance, 'boy' is selected out of a number of words like 'man', 'woman', 'child' and so on. So, there are so many words 'absent in every word chosen in the sentence. And they actually refine and distinguish the meaning. The word 'kicked', for instance, could have been 'killed' or 'kissed'.

2.5 Key Theorists of Structuralism

Levi-Strauss:

Elementary Structures of Kinship is a foundational text of French structuralism. Here he applies the principles of structural linguistics of Saussure and Roman Jakobson to the study of kinship. Structural linguistics holds that with a number of minimal units of meaning, we can construct vast number of system. Further, relation between the terms is more important than the terms themselves. So we can identify the forms, structures, and consistent laws that lie behind diversity of human societies. These constant structural laws regulate social institutions, incest taboo, burial customs and so on.

While analyzing the myth, Levi Strauss does not analyze isolated examples of myth. Myths cannot be analyzed separately but as a group. Like the phonemes—the basic phonetic unit of a language—myths are also comprised of mythemes—the elementary units of myths. Mythemes are created by binary or ternary oppositions. Mythemes are like what Vladimir Propp calls as ‘function’ in a folk tale. (Vladimir Propp was a Russian Folklorist who identified certain basic functions and roles that lie at the heart of all kinds of folk-tales. These constant features are basic units; an individual tale is a combination of some of them. Propp identifies 31 such functions, each of which plays important role in advancing the narrative development.). Further, he also tries to expound some structural principles that characterize all human societies. For instance, he states that the institution of marriage involves a structural principle—the exchange of woman (the bride’s family gives the woman and the groom’s family takes the woman.)

Roland Barthes:

Barthes applies structuralist insight to such unexpected areas as fashion system, selection of food item(s) from a menu in a

restaurant. Individual garments are selected from a paradigm of styles and types, and they are combined according to syntagmatic principles. Hence, garments can be read as though it were a language.

Works of literature, Barthes argues, are nothing but assemblage of signs that function in certain ways to create meaning. Cultural events, objects and phenomena, including film, fashion, images and advertisements—all employ certain signs to create meaning.

Check your Progress:

1. Roland Barthes' significance in theoretical/intellectual practice primarily lies (Find out the right answer) -

- A. in his promotion of linguistic model in the analysis of culture
- B. in his application of structuralist principles in literary criticism
- C. in his evolution of a new school of criticism
- D. in his contribution as a historian of literature

Jacques Lacan:

Lacan re-reads Freud and re-defines unconscious in terms of language. What is unconscious? It is something that human subject cannot have access to. Unconscious is the elusive realm of free, instinctual energy, that is, governed by the pleasure principle. Unconscious, Lacan states, has a structure; it is structured like language.

Though unconscious governs human subjectivity, it never shows itself except in dreams. Freud identified two basic mechanisms involved in dream-work—condensation and displacement. Now, condensation and displacement, Lacan contends, correspond to two

basic structural principles of language identified by Roman Jakobson—metaphor and metonymy.

Condensation implies that several things (feelings, ideas, and images) are compressed into one symbol. This is similar to the principle of similarity and substitution that defines metaphor. Metaphor brings together two different images on the basis of similarity. When we say, ‘the ship ploughed the waves’, we condense into a single item two different images, the ship cutting through the sea and the plow cutting through the soil.

Displacement is a psychic trope that signifies the way the dream work transfers high-impact emotionality into unimportant matters. This is similar to the word-to-word connection that happens along the combination axis of language. And this is metonymic, because it is not similarity that defines metonymy but the contiguity, physical proximity of signs along the horizontal line.

Michel Foucault: Foucault argues that people share a different conceptual framework (episteme) in different epochs. Language plays a crucial role in it. What counts as knowledge changes with time, with the change of episteme and discourse.

Discourse or discursive formation is a coherent group of assumptions and language practices that applies to a particular domain of study. Assumptions which underlie cultural practices are sustained by language practices. So language plays a crucial role in the formation of discourse. For instance, when we talk about the discourse of patriarchy, we are denoting the ways of thinking and practicing language that lends coherence to male rule in society. So, atomistic study of human intercourse at various domains of human activity will not lead to these larger structures. Understanding these structures is like understanding language which governs the concrete phenomena.

Check Your Progress:

Mention key ideas of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan that have structuralist tinge. (50 words)

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2.6 Structuralism and Narratology:

Structuralism strived to uncover the inner or immanent structure of any cultural phenomenon that includes myths, literature and language. Narratology developed as an extension of structuralist approach. It uncovers the rules and structures that govern narrative forms of fictional literature. Given below are some of the aspects of narratology. I have not attempted any exhaustive study of structural/narratological study of fictional literature here, but these aspects will help you understand how structuralist approach was applied in literature.

- At a basic level, narrative implies a succession of events. In narrative fiction, it is a succession of fictional events. we must distinguish here story, text, and narration. Story designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order. ‘text’ is the spoken or verbal discourse which undertakes the telling of the ‘story’; it is what we read. narration is the act of production of this discourse involving the agent who speaks or writes. In our empirical world, it is the author who is responsible for the discourse. In

a narrative text, however, it is the fictional narrator who transmits a narrative to a fictional narratee.

- The story is not directly available to the reader. Do not see it as raw, undifferentiated material. It is structured. An immanent narrative structure can be abstracted from a given narrative text. Underlying an apparent level of narration is a common semiotic level, an immanent level. This immanent level is logically prior to the linguistic level of narration. Hence, a story is abstracted from: 1. The specific style of the question 2. The language of the text, and 3. The sign-system of the text.
- Is this story really independent from the rest? Todorov contends to the contrary, as he says that it is dependent on style, language and medium of the text. In this context, a discussion of the notion of the deep structure and surface structure is quite in order. An infinite variety of stories may be generated from a number of deep structures. In story, we have deep narrative structure and surface narrative structure. Surface structure is syntagmatic, governed by temporal and causal principles. Deep structure is paradigmatic based on static logical relation among elements.
- What is this deep structure of narrative? Levi Strauss's analysis of myth is relevant here. He says that the underlying structure of all myth is that of a four-term homology: A:B::C:D. there are two pairs of oppositions: in Oedipus myth, it is overrating of blood relation and underrating of blood relation. Another pair of opposition is an attempt to escape autochthony and impossibility to succeed in it.

- For the convenience of analysis, structural analysts derive a story-paraphrase by labeling the events. The labels given to events in a story, to the sequence of events in a story, are not necessarily identical with language used in the text. And labeling depends on the level of abstraction. A particular event may be labeled differently. The paraphrase, however, must be homogeneous. And it would be better to paraphrase an event not just as a label but in a simple sentence as it will include the participants of the event. This narrative sentence, called narrative proposition is different from the sentences of the text. And such narrative propositions have to be arranged according to chronological principles. It is the chronological principle that separates a narrative text from a non-narrative text.
- **Surface structure:** Events are of two kinds: ‘kernel’ that offers an alternative to a action. A phone rings. It offers alternatives: either the character can pick it up or not. Catalyst, on the other hand, can amplify, delay or expand the action, and they go with the kernel. Events combine to create micro-sequences which in turn combine to create macro-sequence which jointly create the complete story. Just beneath the complete story, it is possible to find a story-line which is a story involving one set of individuals. Various story-lines within a story can intersect in various ways. Depending on the relative predominance of the story-lines we can find a main story-line and subsidiary story-line.
- How are these events combined into sequences and then into the story? There is a principle of temporality. But story-time is usually identified with ideal chronological order. But events may be simultaneous and the story is often multi-linear. There is, besides, a principle of causality. E. M.

Forster distinguishes between story and plot while both are narrative of events, story stresses the temporality of events and plot emphasizes on the causal connection of events. But it is possible to discern a causal, logical connection among temporally ordered events as well. Causality may be implied in chronology itself.

- Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of Russian Folktales* is a pioneering study of the structural aspects of narrative literature. He unearthed a common pattern that governs narrative propositions of from close to two hundred Russian fairy tales. For this, he abstracted the constant elements, which he called 'function'. A function is an act of a character from the point of view of its significance for a course of action. Function remains constant while the performer, the agent changes. But the same event, located at different points in the story, can fulfill different functions. And he identifies 31 functions in all. Whenever they appear in a story, they occur in the same order. A function contributes to the next function in the story.

(The above points are abstracted from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's book *Narrative Fiction*. You can have a look at the book.)

Stop to Consider:

On the basis of the ideas of narratology, you may consider analyzing a fictional text of your choice. I think a reading of Rimmon-Kenan's book will help you in your analysis. Mind that structuralist/narratological analysis hardly considers the representation of reality, character's psychological realism or historical background or setting of the fictional work.

2.7 Summing Up

With reference to Structuralism, we can say that it tends to reject a life beyond the text preferring to see every book as a ‘construct’ working by certain rules. Moreover, any attempt to interpret a text is often affected by the interpreter’s own sense of reality and his/her own values. Hence, the focus on the text alone, rejecting interpretation in favour of a description of the text’s operation cannot be fully accepted. Considering everything as a ‘construct’ and ‘order-system’ structuralism presented itself as yet another ordering system. It prioritized underlying systems and rules over individual elements or historical specificities.

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UNIT- 3

POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Poststructuralist Thinkers

3.4 Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

3.5 Deconstructionist Approach: How can it be applied to literary texts?

3.6 Summing Up

3.7 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives

In this unit we will try to discuss post-structuralism so that you can see for yourself how the intellectual world of the twentieth century preoccupied itself with the idea of finding out ways in literary studies with the help of an interdisciplinary approach.

However, after going through this unit we claim that you will be able to–

- *see* for yourself what does the term ‘structure’ mean
- *formulate* the notion of Post-structuralism as a theoretical trend
- *find* out about post-structuralism as an approach to literature
- *trace* the unique historical and intellectual background out of which it emerged.

3.2 Introduction

The term ‘Post-structuralism’ became a popular critical and theoretical usage during 1970s. It is not a unified school of thought

or movement. Thinkers most commonly attached to this term are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes. The dismissal of any 'real' (which means an original, authentic, stable referent, experience and meaning) is both a topic and an effect of Post-structuralism. However, the problematic relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified' or event and concept is perhaps the strongest point in Post-structuralism. What makes Post-structuralist theory a relevant way of looking at the contemporary world of change is the 'erasure' or weakening of divisions between 'signifiers' and 'signified', reading and writing, literature and criticism.

Stop to Consider:

There is no denying the fact that Post-structuralism is the working out of the various implications of Structuralism. But it is also quite evident that Post-structuralism tries to deflate the scientific pretensions of structuralism. If structuralism tried to master the manmade world of 'signs', post-structuralism refused to take such claims seriously. We can also say that Post-structuralists are actually Structuralists who suddenly shift their interest finding an error on their ways.

The important thing to notice is that Structuralism set out to master the text and open its secrets. Post-structuralism instead believed that this desire is futile because there are various unconscious, or linguistic or historical forces which cannot be mastered. Post- structuralism explores the differences between what the text says and what it thinks it says. We may also be irritated by Post-structurailsm's failure to arrive at conclusions but we should not forget that while doing this they are only trying to be free from the trap of 'Logocentrism'.

Post-structuralism has radically revised the traditional notion of theory by raising it to a position of prime importance and significance. The thinkers opined that theory has more than literature to account for. Since everything, from the unconscious to social and cultural practices, is seen as functioning like a language, the goal of Post-structuralist theorists are to be found in an understanding of what controls interpretation and meaning in all possible system of signification.

It is also argued that Post-structuralism began with a suspicion of Structuralism's tendency to impose a comprehensive theory on literature. It is concerned less with having a firm hold over the text than with celebrating the text's elusive nature and the fallibility of all readings. As a theoretical tool, it has derived much from Derrida's idea that language is an infinite chain of words having no extra-lingual origin or end. According to Derrida, a text should be seen as an endless stream of 'signifiers' without any final meaning. Such a view rejects the functionality of elements like common sense, and reason the readers have in their minds as they want to pull the text into his or her own frame of reference. At the same time, any attempt at imposing an order on language on the part of the writer, also proves to be inadequate. Such thinking resulted in his most acclaimed theoretical concept known as 'Deconstruction' which is often used interchangeably with Post-structuralism. In another sense, Post-structuralism takes an interdisciplinary stance by incorporating all other approaches that developed after Structuralism.

3.3 Post-Structuralist Thinkers

It is never an easy effort to make a complete list of the Post-structuralist thinkers because being an interdisciplinary approach it

has influenced people from various disciplines starting from humanities to social sciences. Following is an attempt to know some of the prominent ones.

Jacques Derrida:

Derrida was a French thinker who taught philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He made a tremendous impact on contemporary literary studies, especially in the universities of America where his notion of 'Deconstruction' became a major force in 1970s and 80s. Derrida joined a polemic of tradition directed against metaphysics that extends from Nietzsche to Heidegger. His critique of metaphysics and of presence of consciousness owes much to Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious. His challenge against the idealist concept of language is an extension of principles laid down by Ferdinand de Saussure and his Structuralist undertakings. (Read more about Derrida in the next unit)

Michel Foucault:

Foucault was the professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France in Paris. However, he has been described variously as a philosopher, social scientist, and historian of ideas. Foucault likes to be called a Post-structuralist. His works call our attention to the role of language in the exercise and preservation of power. He thought that Structuralism ignored the superficial appearances or common sense view of cultural phenomena in its efforts to have a firm hold over the conditions of their possibilities. While the Structuralists like Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, used language and linguistics as their methodological tool, Foucault used the history of social and political institutions and discourses. His claim over the instability of any universal truth had a powerful impact on writing of literary history in Britain and America.

Foucault believes that the world is more than a galaxy of texts, and that some theories of textuality usually ignore the fact that any discourse is discursively formed out of a power-politics. Such discourses reduce the political and cosmic forces and ideological and social control to aspects of signifying processes. His publications include *Madness and Civilization* (1965), *The Order of Things* (1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and a multi-volumed *History of Sexuality* left unfinished by his death.

Jacques Lacan:

Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, entered the Freudian psychoanalytical movement in 1936. But his radical critique of the orthodox psychoanalytical theory and practice led to his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1959. The publication of his research papers and articles later published as *Ecrits* in Paris in 1964, made him one of the leading figures who became instrumental in the International Dissemination of Structuralist and Post-structuralist ideas of language, literature and the nature of the human subject. His most celebrated theory, “The Unconscious is Structured Like a Language”, implied his borrowing of methods and concepts of modern linguistics and tried to question Saussure’s assumption that there is nothing problematic about the bond between the ‘signified’ and the ‘signifier’ by pointing out that the two ‘signifiers’ ladies and gentlemen may refer to the same signified—a toilet . He concluded that language, the signifying chain, has a life of its own which cannot be anchored to a word of things. Perhaps, this is how his poststructuralist inclinations come to the fore front.

Roland Barthes:

Roland Barthes' Post-structuralism is best represented by his essay '*Death of the Author*'. Rejecting and dismissing the traditional notion of the author's being the origin of the text, the source of meaning and the only authority of the interpretation. His author is stripped off all metaphysical status and finally reduced to allocation where language with its citations, repetitions, echoes and references crosses and re-crosses. The reader is thus free to enter the text from any direction. Barthes' Post-structuralist notions lie in the premise that readers are free to open and close the text's signifying processes without respect for the signified.

Paul de Man:

De Man was the Sterling professor of the Humanities at Yale University. Credit goes to Paul de Man who in a way established the 'Deconstruction' as a valid theoretical tool. Inspired by Derrida, during 1970s, he made Yale the center of 'Deconstruction'. He was mostly interested in the interdisciplinary mix of literature, philosophy and linguistics the components of theory. He is known for his influential books *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971) and *Allegories of Reading* (1979). These two books are regarded as rigorous works of 'Deconstruction'. His *Blindness and Insight* circles around the paradox that critics achieve insights only through a certain kind of blindness. Citing an example of the American New Critics de Man said that they based their practice upon the Coleridgian notion of organic form, according to which a poem has a formal unity analogous to that of natural form. However, instead of trying to discover in poetry the unity and coherence of the natural world, they reveal multifaceted and ambiguous meanings. This ambiguous poetic language seems to contradict their idea of a totality. His other book *Allegories of Reading* develops a rhetorical type of

‘Deconstruction’ already discussed in his first book. He is concerned with the theory of tropes which accompanies rhetorical treatise. Figures of speech (tropes) allow writers to say one thing but mean something else: to substitute one sign for another (metaphor) and to displace meaning from one sign in a chain of signification to another (metonymy). Tropes tend to pervade the world of language by destabilizing Logic, thereby denying the possibility of straightforward literal or referential use of language. To the question “Tea or Coffee?” one may reply “What’s the difference?”. While doing so, one may produce two meanings. One rhetorical- “It makes no difference which I chose”, and the other, literal-“what is the difference between tea and coffee.” De Man grounds his theory on a meticulous ‘close reading’ of specific texts, and considers that it is the effect of language and rhetoric that prevents direct representation of the real. For De man, every reading is a misreading, because tropes intervene between critical and literary texts. His most radical belief is that literary texts are ‘self-deconstructing’ means that a literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of his own rhetorical mode. The interpreter or deconstructor has nothing to do except to collude with the text’s own processes.

J. Hillis Miller:

Known for his books like *The Disappearance Of God* (1963), *Poets of Reality* (1965) the American Professor in English Miller became an enthusiastic disciple of Derrida by applying his theory and method to interpret the idiom of literary criticism. Taking the deconstructive practice a step further, J Hillis Miller in his essay entitled *Stevens’ Rock and Criticism as Cure* explained, “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself.” In this process, texts are subjected to a kind of uncovering of structures that operate

in a text and showing of how these structures can be dismantled by making use of the elements of the text itself.

Check Your Progress:

1. Relate the ideas of the key thinkers of Post-structuralism.
2. What relation can you make of Derrida and Paul de Man?
3. Re-read Lacan and Foucault to understand the significance of what they are saying.
4. Think about Paul de Man's ideas on figurative and literal meaning of a text.

3.4 Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

Poststructuralism and Deconstruction are closely linked intellectual movements. Deconstruction is one of the many strands of poststructuralist thoughts, though both these approaches go back to the thought of Jacques Derrida, emerging as a reaction against assumptions and principles of structuralism. While there can be a number of poststructuralist approaches in the analysis of cultural phenomena, deconstruction is basically a textual approach denoting a theory and practice of reading that dismantles traditional assumptions about a literary text. It resists the assumption, for instance, that a text has a coherent, unified and a determinate meaning(s). Deconstruction demonstrates how some irreconcilable, conflicting and opposed forces reside at the heart of the text. Derrida, the French thinker and one of the most radical intellectuals of contemporary times, is the originator and the foremost exponent of this theory.

Behind such contentions of Derrida's lies a linguistic theory associated with a Swiss linguist called Ferdinand de Saussure, who

defines human language as a system of signs. The signs of a language are not just a list of names and objects. The signs are not positive entities; they can 'mean' something only through a process or a network of difference. Derrida does not merely borrow this concept of difference from Saussure; he re-fashions it into what he calls *differance*. *Differance* means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. 'To differ' is a spacial concept, because what a sign is *not*, is not a specific entity; it refers to many entities, and they are spaced out within the system. For instance, when we come across a word 'rose', what does it differ from? A rose is not a lotus, a lily, a fruit, *ad infinitum*. To defer, on the other hand, implies passage of time. It refers to endless postponement of meaning. As a reader moves on reading a text in a linear fashion, a sign's meaning is also in flux. Hence, what this notion of 'difference' dismisses is the long-cherished idea of meaning as presence.

Let us elaborate more on this notion of meaning as 'presence'. Traditional criticism's belief in definite and stable meaning stems from what Derrida calls the 'metaphysics of presence'. Derrida states that the metaphysics of presence is an inherent trait of western culture. Behind all process of signification lies a desire for presence and center, a self-sufficient and self-certifying ground. Language is also phonocentric, because it accords priority to the spoken over the written language, with the assumption that while speaking the intention of the speaker is fully present in his/ her consciousness; hence it is communicable to an auditor.

This centre, presence or self-certifying ground accords a structure and unity to what we say or write. But such a centre, Derrida contends, is bound to be inherently unstable because it cannot lie outside of language and is, hence, subject to linguistic play. Again, both speech and writing share certain common properties because they are after all signifying processes lacking in full presence.

Logocentric language resorts to binary oppositions such as truth/error, nature/culture, and so on, a system without which it cannot operate. They are, moreover, violently hierarchical, and accord priority to one concept over the other. It is in this way that logocentric language creates a particular value-system in a culture, and naturalizes it.

What is the function of deconstruction?

Deconstruction subverts those binary oppositions; but turning things upside down won't solve the problem. If we move on to centralize the marginal term in a hierarchy, we would unwittingly create another hierarchy. Deconstruction, then, destabilizes both hierarchies, leaving them in a condition of undecideability. By subverting both hierarchies in a dualism, deconstruction denies any possibility or demand of absolute distinction and truth and clarity. This is because clarity, truth and definiteness hinge on the absolute distinction of terms in a dualism. A concept cannot be seen individually in an isolated way because it is inhabited by its opposite, and cannot exist without the other. Difference inhabits every entity or concept in a dualistic system of language; it is in the discovery of such moments that the textual unity and coherence established through hierarchical oppositions collapses.

An important assumption of traditional criticism is there exists a boundary that limits a textual world separating it from the world outside. New criticism, for instance, separated a text from the extra-textual world and favored close scrutiny of the text itself. Deconstructive criticism undoes such categorical divisions of inside and outside. Whereas a text is implicated in a context, the context is also inseparably associated with textuality. This deconstructive move was taken forward by the new historicists who deny 'history' and 'text' as separate categories, because any text has a historical

dimension and historical knowledge is also invariably produced through a process of textuality.

Deconstruction does not explicitly seek to produce a canon by establishing and upholding certain properties of something like a ‘deconstructive’ text. Neither does it seek to associate this condition of meaning with a writer’s intention. Dispersal and postponement of meaning is an inherent property of language; it is not the same as ‘a specific set of determinate meanings’ nor does it have anything to do with the writer’s intention.

How does deconstruction help modern criticism? It liberates criticism from traditional dogma. Deconstruction has radically opened the text to diverse and limitless interpretations. Secondly, it has inspired an intellectual credo to destabilize and decentre larger discourses which had been held stable, rational and sacrosanct. It has become an important strategic critical tool in the hands of the feminist, new historicist and post colonialist critics and scholars to break fresh ground in the domain of criticism.

Check Your Progress:

1. What is deconstruction? (40 words)
2. How are poststructuralism and deconstruction related? (50 words)
3. How does deconstruction problematize the notion of textual meaning? (100 words)

3.5 Deconstructionist Approach: How can it be applied to literary texts?

Deconstructionist approach to literature is basically a theory and a practice of reading literary text that dismantles the assumption that a

text has coherence, unity and determinate meaning. It shows how conflicting forces underly the supposed unity of the text. Derrida was the originator of this approach. Behind Derridean deconstruction lies a linguistic theory—the theory for Saussure that holds that language is a sign-system. Moreover, the ‘signs’ of language are not positive entities; they can signify or mean something only through a process of difference or a network of differences. Derrida reformulates it into the concept of *différance* which means both ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’. To differ is a special concept: it denotes what a sign is not, its ‘other’s are spread out within the synchronic system. To defer is temporal, indicating endless postponement of meaning. What it dismisses is the notion of meaning as ‘presence’.

Traditional criticism’s idea of definite and stable meaning stems from the ‘metaphysics of presence’ which is an inherent trait of western culture. Behind all processes of signification lies a desire for presence and center, a self-sufficient and self-certifying ground. They are also phonocentric, because they accord priority to the spoken over the written language, assuming that while speaking, the intention of the speaker is fully present in his/her consciousness, and is equally communicable to an auditor.

This centre, presence or self-certifying ground accord a structure and unity to what we say or write. But such a centre or presence is unstable, because they are themselves subjected to linguistic play. Again, speech and writing share certain common properties as they are signifying processes lacking full presence.

Logocentric language resorts to a system of binary oppositions such as truth/error, nature/culture etc only through which it can operate. They are moreover violently hierarchical, according priority to one concept over the other. Thus, logocentric language creates a particular value-system in a culture and naturalizes it. One mode of

Derridian deconstructive criticism is subversion of binary oppositions. But centralizing the marginal term in a hierarchy would create another hierarchy. Deconstruction destabilizes both hierarchies, leaving them in a condition of undecidability. Notion of clarity, truth and definiteness hinges on absolute distinction of terms in such oppositions. By subverting both hierarchies in a dualism deconstruction denies any possibilities of an absolute distinction. It is because each concept can be seen individually, in any unique way, as it is inhabited by its opposite and cannot exist without the other. Difference inhabits every entity or concept in dualistic system of language. It is in the discovery of such moments that the textual unity and coherence established through hierarchical oppositions collapse.

It is an assumption of traditional criticism that there exists a boundary that limits a textual world, separating it from the outside world. New criticism, for instance, separates a text from extra-textual world and favored close scrutiny of the text itself. But deconstruction or deconstructive criticism deconstructs such inside/outside division. Whereas a text is implemented in a context, the context is also not free from textuality. This move was taken forward by the New Historicists who deny that history and texts are separate categories and assert the historicity of the text and textuality of history. Meaning is dispersed among innumerable alternatives as well as it is endlessly postponed. It has nothing to do with the writer's intention, because it is the inherent property of language.

How does deconstruction help modern criticism? It liberates criticism from traditional dogmas. It is because of the undecidability of meaning and 'play' of textuality, interpretive act is repeated endlessly. Moreover, it helps decenter larger discourses and

deconstruct wider concepts, as in feminist criticism and postcolonial criticism.

Decentering the text, a deconstructive principle, has been implemented by feminists who centers hitherto marginalized women writers. Critique of patriarchy in a text, is a deconstructionist move.

Paul de Man: Paul de Man asserts that contrary meanings inhabit a text. And he says that the contrary forces underlying a texts supposed unity, is grammar and rhetoric.

Grammatical and rhetorical meanings are not just different but are mutually exclusive. He cites the example of rhetorical question where the grammatical structure allows us to expect an answer to the question, but the rhetorical structure even denies the possibility of asking questions. He cites an example from Yeats's poem "Among School Children", where the poet says:

"How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

Seen as a rhetorical question, it asserts the inalienability of form and experience, of unity of the dancer and the dance. From this position, the preceding synecdochic images of the tree become metaphors of unity stated in the last line. If, on the other hand, we read the last line literally, then we presume that there exists a difference between the dancer and the dance., which would compel us to re-read the previously assumed organic metaphor of the tree, and a different interpretation will follow. It is not just a matter of choosing the correct option: it is a condition of the text. It is according to de Man not something we apply to the text but something that exists in the text itself.

From the above light, we can read Wordsworth poem "Upon Westminster Bridge" in a deconstructive mode. We will see how an irreconcilable contradiction inhabits the text by Wordsworth. The subject of the poem is the city of London, which is viewed in the

morning atmosphere from the Westminster bridge. The first quatrain articulates a sense of wonder at the majestic beauty of the city. The second quatrain employs a metaphor of dress to extol the city for which the tone is already set in the first quatrain. Now, a contradiction sets in between the metaphor used and the synecdochic images of the city. The metaphor of cloth carries a suggestion of covering a body which is bare or naked. On the other hand, the synecdochic images—ships, Thames, the fields carry an air of openness and naturalness. This naturalness is further carried over into the image of the rising sun, changing landscape and the flowing river.

Evidently, there is an overwhelming appreciation of beauty. What is the object of the poet's appreciation? If the poet appreciated the beauty of the city, where lies the essence of the city—in its outwardly projected self, which is a result of dressing, or its true, natural self? The metaphor of cloth suggests that the true, naked self of the city is probably dark and not worthy of appreciation. If we emphasize on the synecdochic images of the city, we learn that this openness and naturalness is the true self of the city, and its beauty and grandeur will gradually vanish with the din and bustle of the day.

Thus, the figurative texture of the poem allows contrary meanings to exist one alongside the other.

1. It is the appearance of the city, its covered up image or look, that the poet appreciates, while its naked self would reveal its dark, ugly face.
2. It is at this morning atmosphere that the city is more true to itself, more immersed in nature, and open to the entire world, though the people are oblivious of it.

3. What follows from these two readings of the poem is the poem is both an appreciation and an indictment. The city is both valorized and criticized.

Stop to Consider:

Now, from your understanding of deconstruction, attempt a critical analysis of any literary text. Apply the basic deconstructionist/poststructuralist notion of irreconcilable contradiction inhabiting the text, in your reading of the text at hand. Please be noted that deconstruction is not a formula that can be applied in any text without a close reading of the same, and without looking at the nuances of meaning embedded in the text's language.

3.6 Summing Up

If we are to judge the significance and implications of Structuralism and Post-structuralism we cannot help saying that these are two valid but very dull, technical approach to literary studies. With the emergence of Post-structuralism, we enter into an area of total chaos. Because unlike Structuralism which emphasized on having a firm hold on the text, Post-structuralism came to acknowledge the text's elusive nature and the fallibility of all sorts of readings. In essence, post-structuralism emphasizes on instability, multiplicity and fluidity of interpretation and representation; it questions simultaneously authority, certainty, and objectivity in analysing texts, culture, and society.

3.7 References and Suggested Readings

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UNIT- 4

POSTCOLONIALISM

Unit Structure:

4.1 Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Major Theorists

4.4 Postcolonialism – The Movement

4.5 Major Concepts

4.6 Summing Up

4.7 References and Suggested Reading

4.1 OBJECTIVES

We are going to make here a brief survey of the main features of postcolonialism, its major theorists, and their prominent texts. You should expect that by the time you have finished working through this unit, your understanding of postcolonialism will enable you to—

- *make connections* between literature and postcolonial thought;
- *analyse* the major postcolonial approach found in a literary text; and
- *understand* how postcolonialism remains relevant in the modern world.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Postcolonialism is a critical framework that examines the cultural, political, and social legacies of colonialism and imperialism.

Emerging in the latter half of the 20th century, it seeks to understand and deconstruct the power dynamics established by colonial rule and their enduring effects on formerly colonized societies. This movement encompasses a diverse range of disciplines, including literature, history, anthropology, and political science, aiming to amplify marginalized voices and challenge dominant narratives perpetuated by colonial powers.

The roots of postcolonialism can be traced to the decolonization movements that gained momentum after World War II. As nations in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East achieved independence, there arose a need to critically assess the cultural and psychological impacts of colonialism. Intellectuals and writers from these regions began to articulate the complexities of their identities, shaped by both indigenous traditions and colonial influences. This introspection laid the groundwork for postcolonial thought, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming history and culture from colonial narratives.

One of the seminal works in postcolonial theory is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said argues that Western representations of the East, or the 'Orient,' have historically been steeped in stereotypes and biases, serving to justify colonial domination. He posits that the 'Orient' was constructed as the West's contrasting image, embodying everything the West was not—irrational, exotic, and backward. This "us versus them" dichotomy, Said contends, has profound implications for how knowledge and power are intertwined: "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (ch 1).

Building upon Said's foundation, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduced the concept of the "subaltern" to postcolonial discourse.

Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's work, Spivak uses the term to describe populations that are socially, politically, and geographically marginalized. In her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), she examines how these marginalized groups are often denied a voice within dominant power structures, both during and after colonial rule. Spivak cautions against oversimplified representations of the subaltern, emphasizing the complexities of their experiences: "The subaltern cannot speak... representation has not withered away" (Spivak 308).

Homi K. Bhabha, another pivotal figure in postcolonial studies, introduced concepts such as "hybridity" and the "third space." He explores how colonized peoples navigate and negotiate their identities amidst the cultural intersections of colonial influence and indigenous traditions. Bhabha suggests that these in-between spaces offer possibilities for resistance and the creation of new cultural forms: "Hybridity... is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (ch 3).

Literature has been a vital medium for expressing postcolonial themes, providing nuanced insights into the lived experiences of colonized peoples. Postcolonial literature often grapples with issues of identity, displacement, and the lingering effects of colonialism. Authors from formerly colonized nations use their narratives to challenge colonial histories and assert their cultural identities. For instance, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) portrays the disruptions caused by European colonialism in Igbo society, highlighting the clash between traditional African cultures and Western influences. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) delves into India's transition from British colonialism to independence, intertwining personal and national histories to explore the complexities of postcolonial identity.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and theorist, has been a vocal advocate for writing in indigenous languages. In his collection of essays, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), he discusses the profound impact of language on culture and identity, arguing that the use of colonial languages in African literature perpetuates cultural imperialism. Ngugi emphasizes the need to embrace native languages to reclaim cultural heritage: "Language carries culture, and culture carries... the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (Thiong'o 16).

Postcolonialism remains a dynamic and evolving field, continually addressing new forms of imperialism and global power imbalances. In an era marked by globalization, migration, and transnationalism, postcolonial theory provides critical tools to analyze how historical injustices influence present-day realities. It challenges scholars and practitioners to consider whose voices are heard and whose are marginalized, advocating for more inclusive and equitable narratives.

4.3 MAJOR THEORISTS

Postcolonialism is enriched by the contributions of both foundational and contemporary theorists who have critically examined the enduring impacts of colonialism on societies, cultures, and identities. This overview highlights the works of several key figures, offering insights into their theories and contributions to the field.

- **Frantz Fanon**: He was a Martinican psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary whose work has profoundly influenced postcolonial studies. His incisive analyses of colonialism's psychological and social ramifications have

provided a framework for understanding the dehumanizing effects of colonization and the pathways to liberation.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon explores the internalization of racism and the resulting identity crises among colonized individuals. Drawing from his psychiatric background, he examines how colonialism imposes a sense of inferiority on Black people, leading them to adopt the culture and language of the colonizer in an attempt to gain acceptance. This work delves into the psychological dimensions of oppression, highlighting the deep-seated impacts of systemic racism on personal identity.

Fanon's later work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) extends his critique to the broader socio-political structures of colonialism. He argues that colonialism is inherently violent, and thus, decolonization necessitates a violent upheaval to dismantle oppressive systems. Fanon posits that this revolutionary violence is a cathartic process, essential for the psychological liberation of the colonized: "Decolonization is always a violent event" (Fanon 1).

Beyond advocating for physical resistance, Fanon emphasizes the importance of cultural reclamation. He critiques the colonial narrative that portrays indigenous cultures as inferior, urging colonized peoples to rediscover and valorize their pre-colonial histories and traditions. This cultural renaissance is, for Fanon, a crucial component of the decolonization process, fostering a sense of pride and unity among formerly subjugated populations.

- **Edward Said:** Said's seminal work *Orientalism* is foundational to postcolonial studies. In this text, Said critiques how the Western world perceives and represents

the East, arguing that these portrayals are not objective truths but constructed narratives serving colonial interests. He introduces the concept of “Orientalism” to describe the West's patronizing depictions of “the Orient” as exotic, backward, and uncivilized. Said asserts that such representations are instrumental in justifying Western dominance. This work challenges scholars to recognize and deconstruct the power dynamics embedded in cultural narratives and has profoundly influenced subsequent postcolonial discourse.

- **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**: Beyond her influential concept of the subaltern, Spivak has introduced and engaged with several other critical ideas that have significantly shaped postcolonial discourse. One of Spivak's notable contributions is the concept of “strategic essentialism.” This term refers to the deliberate, temporary adoption of a unified group identity to facilitate collective action, especially among marginalized communities. Spivak also delves into the concept of “epistemic violence,” which she describes as the harm done to marginalized groups through the imposition of the colonizer's ways of knowing and understanding the world. Spivak argues that Western intellectual frameworks often marginalize or misrepresent the voices of the colonized, particularly women, thereby perpetuating a cycle of oppression.

Spivak's theoretical framework is profoundly influenced by various thinkers. Her engagement with deconstructionist philosophy is evident in her translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, where her extensive preface offers critical insights into deconstructive strategies. Additionally, she draws upon the works of Karl Marx, particularly his

critiques of capitalism and class structures, to analyze the economic dimensions of colonialism and its aftermath. Michel Foucault's ideas on power relations and discourse further inform Spivak's understanding of how knowledge systems perpetuate colonial dominance. Moreover, Antonio Gramsci's concept of the "subaltern" significantly shapes her analyses of marginalized groups and their capacity for agency within oppressive structures.

- **Homi K. Bhabha**: Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) introduces key concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and the "third space," which have become central to postcolonial theory. Bhabha explores how colonized peoples navigate and negotiate their identities amidst cultural intersections of colonial influence and indigenous traditions. He suggests that these in-between spaces offer possibilities for resistance and the creation of new cultural forms. Bhabha's theories provide a framework for understanding the fluid and dynamic nature of cultural identity in postcolonial contexts.
- **Achille Mbembe**: Mbembe is a Cameroonian philosopher who offers a critical examination of power and subjectivity in postcolonial Africa through his work *On the Postcolony* (2001). Mbembe challenges traditional narratives that depict Africa solely through lenses of deprivation and crisis. Instead, he presents the postcolony as a complex social and political space where power is both exerted and subverted in multifaceted ways. He introduces the concept of "necropolitics" to describe how sovereign powers dictate who may live and who must die, extending Foucault's notion of biopolitics. Mbembe's analysis delves into the aesthetics of vulgarity and the intimate entanglements between rulers

and the ruled, offering a nuanced perspective on the lived realities of postcolonial subjects.

- **Trinh T. Minh-ha**: She is a Vietnamese filmmaker and theorist who explores the intersections of postcolonialism, feminism, and representation. In her influential work *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989), Trinh critiques traditional anthropological and feminist discourses that often marginalize women of color. She emphasizes the importance of voice and the challenges of speaking from the position of the “Other.” Trinh introduces the concept of the “inappropriate/d other” to describe those who do not fit neatly into predefined categories, challenging binary oppositions and advocating for a more inclusive understanding of identity and difference.
- **Robert J.C. Young**: Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) provides a comprehensive overview of the development of postcolonial theory, tracing its roots from anti-colonial movements to contemporary debates. Young examines the intersections of postcolonialism with Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the field. He emphasizes the importance of understanding postcolonialism not just as a reaction to colonialism but as an active and ongoing process of resistance and reconstruction. Young's work is instrumental in mapping the historical and theoretical trajectories that have shaped postcolonial studies.
- **Vivek Chibber**: Chibber's *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013) offers a critical examination of postcolonial theory, particularly focusing on the Subaltern

Studies group. Chibber argues that certain strands of postcolonial thought have overstated the cultural differences between the West and the Global South, potentially undermining universal frameworks for understanding capitalism and oppression. He contends that while cultural specificities are important, there are universal aspects of human experience, especially concerning exploitation and resistance, which transcend cultural boundaries. Chibber's critique has sparked significant debate, prompting a reevaluation of the assumptions underlying postcolonial studies.

These theorists, among others such as Amar Acheraïou, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Derek Gregory, have significantly shaped the discourse of postcolonialism, each bringing unique perspectives and critiques that continue to influence and challenge our understanding of colonial legacies and their enduring impacts on contemporary societies.

4.4 POSTCOLONIALISM – THE MOVEMENT

A defining moment for postcolonial studies was in 1978 when Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published. But prior to it, postcolonial literature and criticism had already made its appearance in 1950 with Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, and *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon. In 1958 came *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, while *The Pleasures of Exile* by George Lamming came out in 1960, with Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* following in 1961. Later, important work by Gayatri C.Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Benita Parry and Kwame Anthony Appiah, too, made its appearance.

Postcolonial criticism and theory is connected with the history of colonialism or imperialism. In one sense, postcolonialism is part of the project of decolonization. It is difficult to pinpoint the absolute beginnings of postcolonialism. The “post-” in the term comprises a problem rather than a solution. For one thing, even though “structures of colonial control” broke up in the late 1950s and reached a climax in the 1960s, we are still left to answer, after whose colonialism? Moreover, it is widely recognised that colonialism still persists in many ways. Thus the periodization of the concept is also problematic. Said’s work may be said to belong to the heightened consciousness of postcolonial critics of colonial power which underlies all postcolonial theory. Postcolonial criticism develops from theories of colonial discourses. In other words it is from the study of the operations and aims of colonial discourses that postcolonialism makes its advances. Since colonial power uses arguments to justify its domination over the colonised peoples its representations and modes of perception are important topics of analysis in postcolonial theory.

A crucial concept that lies at the heart of postcolonial theory is cultural identity. You can understand this from what Ngugi wa Thiong’o has to say:

“Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other human beings.”

Since colonialism meant cultural encounters in an exploitative political relationship of coloniser dominating the colonised, differences of culture, race, ethnicity, community and language

become the primary zones in which the politics occurs. This is what lies at the basis of what Ngugi wa Thiong'o has to say:

“Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.”

Reading English Literature after postcolonialism:

Postcolonialism inevitably brought forth a challenge to the older ways of reading and judging literary texts. This is related to the fact that the study of English literary texts in the colonies was meant to inculcate in the indigenous peoples a sense of the *universality* of Christian moral values as manifested in *English* literature. Despite his vast analysis of ‘Orientalism’, Said’s comments regarding the status of ‘classics’ have not laid to rest the problems regarding the ‘canon’ of English literature. However, it is through the intellectual apparatus of postcolonialism that foreign readers of English literature are allowed to raise issues of cultural values for discussion.

STOP TO CONSIDER:

Extensions of postcolonialist approaches:

- **Migrancy** - This is an important concept in the description of the relation of an individual to her/his ‘home’, community and the imagined sense of belonging. It allows the analysis of the relation that gets foregrounded in the context of the dislocations that are a necessary part of the colonial and the post-colonial world. It also

relates to the cultural boundaries that tend to be drawn and re-drawn as part of the process of dislocation.

- **Hybridity** - This concept has been formulated by Homi K. Bhabha to underline the ways in which postcolonial identities are determined through border crossings and re-crossings. The ‘border’ is an important related concept here as it shows how cultures are not ‘pure’ but are intermingled.
- **Subaltern studies** - A group of “left-wing historians, the Subaltern Studies Group (of whom the best-known are Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha) and others in dialogue with them . . . The intention of the group is to produce historical accounts in opposition to the dominant versions, broadly categorized as colonial or neo-colonial, and nationalist or neo-nationalist, and which construe Indian history, especially the move towards independence, as the doings of the elite, . . and ignore the actions of the mass of the mass of the population”
- **Nativism** - This is the topic of discussion by Benita Parry in her famous essay, “Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism” (1994).
- **Eurocentrism** relates to the assumption in postcolonial theory that the intellectual and cultural traditions developed outside the west can undo the heritage of knowledge and ideas which led to the colonised people’s feeling of inferiority. ‘Eurocentrism’ is the term signifying the opposition to western ideologies which devalue the intellectual heritage developed outside the west. Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s phrase, “decolonizing the mind” and “moving the centre” evokes the opposition to ‘eurocentrism’ and implies the need to dismantle the intellectual authority and dominance of Europe.

If we take up postcolonialism as the production of colonial stereotypes through which colonial power sustained itself we get involved with the problem of representation and stereotyping of the people and culture of the colonised nations. Thus there has been a preponderance of studies of discursive practices in the context of colonial structures. It is in this respect that Edward Said's *Orientalism* constitutes a seminal piece of work. His study shows that 'Orientalism' is a discourse which reveals more about the West's fantasies of power, and assumptions regarding the culture and the people of the Orient, than the Orient itself. Orientalist representations are thus bound up with the structures of political domination.

The concept of the nation is an important one in postcolonialist study since nationalist anti-colonialism constitutes an important plank from which to investigate Orientalist assumptions. Fanon writes of "National Culture" in his *Wretched of the Earth* to conduct a critique of the cultural domination that takes place in colonialism. 'Nation' was a concept used in the political overthrow of colonial power, especially in the early phases, thus making it a discourse of great potency. This is just one example of how postcolonialist study formulates its concepts. From the idea of nation and the elements that go into discourses based on it, issues relating to language, history, and race find a place in postcolonial study. To some critics, nationalism as a discourse is said to be derived from the west thus inscribing a question-mark over the status of anti-colonial nationalism. Partha Chatterji, in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), raises questions of this kind. Critics like Etienne Balibar raise further questions as to how nationalism can be complicit with racism.

In the opposition to colonial rule we see the emergence of many anti-colonial thinkers as, for instance, in India the names of Gandhi and Nehru. Gandhi's early text, *Hind Swaraj*, is an important text in laying down the principles of anti-colonial resistance. The work is remarkable in presenting clearly in dialogue-form the range of topics and concepts which needed to be addressed in conducting the struggle against colonial domination. As the attempt to chart out an alternative, in civilizational terms, to colonial domination, Gandhi makes a remarkable presentation of a vision of society as critique of a western conception of progress and development. Similarly, Nehru charts the history of the anti-colonial struggle in India and the range of issues it needed to address in his *Autobiography*. What Nehru, most perceptively, pointed out was the 'internalisation' of the "ideology of Empire" which tended to weaken the resistance on crucial aspects of economism and communal divisions.

The reading of literary texts in English, especially by writers of Asian or African origin, in the context of postcolonial studies has brought to the fore questions regarding literary value. Meenakshi Mukherjee, the well-known critic, explains that postcolonial study "makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we are made to take for granted". Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian writer, denounced *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in 1975 on the grounds that Conrad was racist. Controversial, though this was, it helped in the reexamination of 'classics' and their relation with culturally different readers and writers. In this sense, 'classics' have been put to new uses different from the colonial ones of asserting colonial superiority on cultural grounds.

STOP TO CONSIDER:

Edward W. Said:

Said adopts a Foucauldian perspective in *Orientalism* in bringing out the connections between knowledge and power. This gives him to scope to bring together a wide variety of discourses (history, ethnography, geography, politics, literature, linguistics) which produce knowledge of the Orient in their specific ways but all establishing categories of 'truth'. Although all these different discourses (which produce knowledge about their object of study - the Orient) might well be in contradiction with each other, they articulate congruent (or matching) forms of knowledge about the Orient. This gives rise to a meta-discourse - Orientalism - which is powerful and seems to confirm the prevailing idea that only Westerners *really know* the Orient.

In his work, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said observes that representation is "one of the key problems in all criticism and philosophy". The representation of the East in the West has been through strategies which "validate Western values, political and economic systems and structures of domination, by positing as Other anyone and anything at odds with Western institutions. The factors that make the Other especially menacing are its difference and its mysterious aura. According to Said, the strategies through which the Other is constructed are fundamentally textual, for images and stereotypes of the Orient have traditionally been emplaced through writing . . . Said underscores the textual dimension of alterity by pointing out that Orientalism's imaginary Other first comes into being "when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in one's previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has

read about it.” . . . All Orientalist texts are ultimately fictional: accounts about the East, its inhabitants and its cultural traditions endeavour to present their contents as self-evident *facts* but what they invariably supply is actually a cluster of mythical presuppositions.” (Cavallaro, p.126-7)

4.5 MAJOR CONCEPTS

Postcolonialism encompasses several key concepts that critically analyze the enduring impacts of colonialism on societies, cultures, and identities. Here are some of the major concepts:

1. Hybridity

Introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), hybridity refers to the creation of new cultural forms resulting from the interaction between colonizer and colonized cultures. This concept challenges the notion of fixed identities, suggesting that postcolonial identities are fluid and constantly evolving. Bhabha argues that hybridity disrupts the power dynamics inherent in colonial relationships by creating a “third space” where new meanings and representations emerge. He posits that this space “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (Bhabha).

2. Subaltern

The term “subaltern,” adopted by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak from Antonio Gramsci, refers to populations that are socially, politically, and geographically marginalized. In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Spivak examines how these groups are often denied agency and voice within dominant power structures.

She argues that the subaltern cannot speak within the frameworks of colonial discourse, as their voices are systematically excluded or appropriated. Spivak's work highlights the challenges of representing marginalized groups without perpetuating their oppression.

3. Orientalism

Coined by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978), this concept describes the West's patronizing representations and perceptions of Eastern societies. Said argues that Orientalism is a framework used by Western scholars and policymakers to justify colonial domination by depicting Eastern cultures as exotic, backward, and uncivilized. This constructed dichotomy between the "Occident" and the "Orient" reinforces stereotypes and sustains unequal power relations. Said's critique exposes how knowledge production is intertwined with power and serves imperial interests.

4. Mimicry

Also explored by Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry refers to the imitation of the colonizer's culture, language, and behavior by the colonized. While intended to civilize and assimilate, mimicry often results in a blurred line between the colonizer and the colonized, creating a sense of ambivalence. This ambivalence can undermine colonial authority, as the colonized subject becomes a "partial presence," both similar to and different from the colonizer. Bhabha suggests that mimicry is a form of resistance that disrupts the clear-cut distinctions imposed by colonial discourse.

5. Neocolonialism

Neocolonialism refers to the continued economic, political, and cultural dominance of former colonial powers over previously colonized countries, even after formal independence. This concept highlights how global systems, such as capitalism and international trade, perpetuate inequalities reminiscent of colonial times. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, popularized the term in his book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), arguing that foreign capital and influence continue to exploit African nations, undermining their sovereignty.

6. Decolonization

Decolonization involves the process of undoing colonial power structures and achieving political, economic, and cultural independence. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) emphasizes that decolonization is inherently a violent process, as it involves the overthrow of entrenched systems of oppression. Fanon argues that violence is a necessary means for the colonized to reclaim their identity and agency. Decolonization also encompasses efforts to revive indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledge systems suppressed during colonial rule.

7. Othering

Othering is the process by which colonial discourse defines colonized peoples as fundamentally different and inferior to the colonizers. This concept involves constructing the identity of the colonized as the "Other," reinforcing a binary opposition between the civilized "Self" and the primitive "Other." Such representations

justify colonial domination and dehumanize the colonized. Postcolonial scholars analyze how literature, media, and academic writings have perpetuated these stereotypes, influencing contemporary perceptions and power dynamics.

8. Double Consciousness

Introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), double consciousness describes the internal conflict experienced by subordinated or colonized groups in an oppressive society. It refers to the sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of others, leading to a fragmented self-identity. Du Bois writes, “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (Du Bois). This concept has been influential in postcolonial studies, highlighting the psychological impact of colonization on identity formation.

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4.6 SUMMING UP

In this chapter, we have discussed postcolonialism as a movement in detail. We have discussed major concepts and major theorists. I hope you will delve more into the suggested reading given in the next section to develop a greater understanding of the topic.

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UNIT- 5

NEW CRITICISM

Unit Structure:

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Historical Background

5.3 Important Figures

5.3.1 I.A. Richards: (1893-1979)

5.3.2 William Empson: (1906-1984)

5.3.3 Allen Tate: (1899-1979)

5.3.4 John Crowe Ransom: (1888-1974)

5.3.5 William Wimsatt, Jr. (1907-1975) and Monroe C. Beardsley: (1915-1985)

5.4 Key Concepts

5.4.1 Autonomy of the Text

5.4.2 Intentional Fallacy

5.4.3 Affective Fallacy

5.4.4 Irony and Paradox

5.4.5 Ambiguity

5.4.6 Metaphor

5.4.7 Tension

5.4.8 Organic Form/Unity

5.5 Summing Up

5.6 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

New Criticism was an influential critical movement in the course of modern literary criticism. If it is in some ways aligned with Structuralism and Russian Formalism, more recent trends such as Marxism, Post-structuralism, Feminist or New-historicism

developed as a reaction against the New-critical ethos. By the end of this unit you will be able to

- *familiarize* yourself with the historical background and philosophical heritage of New Criticism
- *discuss* how the movement is continuous with or departs from critical tendencies and theorization prevalent in earlier times
- *find* out important critics and literary scholars associated with New Criticism
- *explore* ideas and concepts central to this particular school of criticism.

5.2 Historical Background

The term ‘New Criticism’ was coined by John Crowe Ransom in his book entitled *The New Criticism* published in 1941. It implies a theory and a form of practice prevalent in Anglo-American literary criticism between 1940s and 1960s. Three important books that served as the foundational text of this critical movement are *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Practical Criticism* (1929), and *Understanding Poetry* (1938). Various critical essays of T.S. Eliot also paved the way for the development of New Criticism.

During the course of your studying New Criticism, you might ask yourself—where does New Criticism stand in the tradition of English literary criticism? Firstly, it can be argued that it is a reaction against some of the important critical insights and tendencies of the Romantics whose dominant tendency was to see the value and significance of literary work as the result of authorial intention or the ‘expression’ of the intention of the authors. The root of literary truth thus lies in the sincerity of emotions and feelings experienced by the author. New Criticism dispensed with the

question of author while assessing a work of art. Secondly, it is a reaction against the historical and philological approaches to literature— a thrust then prevalent in the arena of literary study. John Crowe Ransom, for instance, when he was Carnegie Professor of Poetry at Kenyon College, organized academic discussions regularly pleading for a pure criticism that could overthrow historical and philological scholarship then in vogue in the universities. He argued for exclusive focus on the literary techniques rather than on biography, morality, psychology and sought to replace extrinsic with ‘intrinsic’ criticism. Thirdly, during the heyday of New Criticism, criticism became a self-contained academic discipline. It is not that literary works were not part of the curriculum in schools and universities in the English-speaking world, but study of literature was included in various disciplines— rhetoric, philology, history. But criticism did not play any significant part. However, from the 1920s, there started a sudden vogue in academic institutions of critical interpretation which included analysis and introduction of evaluative judgment of literary works.

Is there any common agenda of this New Critical school? Key theorists and thinkers associated with this school have their own agenda and propositions. In fact, there are differences and disagreements amongst the New Critics themselves. Yet they all agree upon the question of the object of literary criticism. The basic assumption was that reading a text in terms of authorial intention, effect on the reader or its historical context cannot do justice to the text which is a texture of variously patterned linguistic elements. The text is an autonomous, self-contained entity and is itself the proper object of criticism. A text must be studied in its own terms and extra-textual yardsticks should not be brought to bear upon it.

Stop to Consider:

New Criticism and Empiricism

New Criticism not merely talks about literary text as the object of literary study, it also dwells extensively on the 'nature' of 'textual experience'. 'Experience' here is a key word because critics see literature, and more specifically, poetry as embodied experience, which cannot be reduced to a set of principles or propositional truth. Philosophically the term 'experience' refers to empiricism, and let us note that the philosophical origin of New Criticism is empiricism.

How do we derive knowledge of a literary text? According to the New Critics, any reference to context, either historical or biographical, or understanding of how a text affects a reader does not help us in this regard. The only way to acquire the experience of the text itself is through 'close-reading' of the text. Reading is itself an experience which is the authentic source of truth and knowledge. Empiricism is based on the assumption that all knowledge is derived from experience. (The first empiricists were physicians who derived their rules of medical practice from their experience alone.)

The mind, according to the Empiricists, is capable of organizing experience and that there is no 'innate' idea as ideas are impressed upon the human mind by experience itself. There are two ways in which knowledge-formation is possible- (i) perception and (ii) reflection of the mind. John Zock Dennis refers to the existence of 'innate' ideas but asserts that mind has an innate power of reflection.

We should not, however, confuse poetic experience with scientific and practical knowledge. New Critics are assertive of the distinctive character of literary knowledge which greatly

differs from scientific knowledge. Whereas literary knowledge is derived through perception, non-literary knowledge is based on reflection of the mind.

Despite insistence on ‘authorial intention’ or ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’, there are also continuities between Romantic criticism and New Criticism. Let us take the example of Coleridge. In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge offers a theorization of poetry and its relation to the poet. Poetry, to Coleridge, is not just an outward expression of a poet’s inner feelings because imagination plays a creative and transformative role. Imagination, Coleridge says, “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate”. Besides, imagination fuses the opposites; it denotes a balance or reconciliation of “opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concreto; the idea with the image; the individual, with the representative.....” This accounts for the organic unity of poetry, the interrelationships of poetic elements and their inseparability from the whole—facilitated by imagination. Such a doctrine is an important antecedent to the New Critical concept of literary work as a self-contained whole. Of course, pervasive insistence of the Romantics on the link between the poet and the poem, the cause and the effect, the literary phenomenon and its subjective origin did not find any importance in the New Critics. New Critical ethos goes against the dominant Romantic concept of the origin of any literary phenomenon.

John Keats’ idea of the relation between a poet and his/her poem greatly departs from the expresser’s notion of art, and is more attuned towards new critical ethos. As I shall elaborate later, the biographical account of the poet is irrelevant to the reading of the poem, declare Wimsatt and Beardsley in *The Intentional Fallacy*. Keats is dismissive of Romantic subjectivism. In a letter to Sir

Richard Woodhouse, he says: “The poetical character... is not itself, it has no self, it is everything and nothing, it has no character...a poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity- he is continually in for and filling some other body”.The implication is important as knowledge about the poet does not help in the reading of the poem.

SAQ:

Can you name a text or any category of texts where the ‘author’ or the source can be overlooked? Would you include a newspaper report in this category? (20 + 20 Words)

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If you ask yourself a question—Is New Criticism just a method of reading or does it also embody a distinctive ideology? In subsequent critical trends, with the advent of a variety of ‘political reading’ of literary works, the New Critics are accused of a certain snobbery because of their exclusive focus on a clearly demarcated text, alienated from its various contexts. You should however understand that such a separation of the text from history as well as the circumstances of its production could also imply a ‘closure’ of reading rather than opening up of the text to diverse possibilities of meaning. Critics like Terry Eagleton, Frank Lentriccia critiqued New Criticism for this kind of conservatism. Such conservatism has also its political origin. In America, the ‘little magazine’ *The Fugitive* formed a group of critics that included Allen Tate, John

Crowe Ransom and Austin Warren. By 1931, *The Fugitive* evolved as 'The Agrarians'. The Agrarians were conservative and defended the south because the north was seen as materialistic, industrial and socially progressive. They upheld, in numerous essays and letters, the organic unity of the south. Although the group disappeared by 1937, Ransom, Tate, Warren and Brooks turned to literary criticism and the conservative political background inspired them to uphold a formalist poetic.

An affinity between the Formalists and the New Critics can be perceived. Both unanimously fixed the object of investigation. Both employ a mode of 'intrinsic' criticism, brushing aside the 'extrinsic' elements from the scene. Both share a pervasive concern for 'form', unlike the formalists, the New Critics insisted on the irreducibility of literary experience that cannot be paraphrased by any degree of scientific precision.

Stop to Consider

New Criticism versus Russian Formalism:

An important point of convergence between New Criticism and Russian Formalism is that both regard literature as self-contained verbal entity. They insist on the autonomy of the literary text. One important offshoot of such an assumption is that they promote a mode of intrinsic criticism and reject extra-literary criteria to judge literary texts. Let us, in this context, quote from Hans Bertens: "Although Eliot is obviously very much interested in poetic technique and in the form of specific poems, an interest that would be worked out by a group of American poets and critics, the so-called New Critics – he is ultimately more interested in a poem's meaning. Poetry should convey complex meanings in which attitudes that might easily

be seen as contradictory are fused and which allow us to see things that we otherwise would not see. Our job, then, is to interpret poems after which we can pass judgment on them; that is, establish how well they succeed in creating and conveying the complexity of meaning that we expect from them...the idea that we read poems, and literature in general, because they contain meaning, is obvious. This search for the meaning of poems, novels, plays and other works of literature has from the 1920s well into the 1970s absolutely dominated English and American literary studies and still constituted one of their important activities.” To the Formalists, however, literary investigation should not be directed to the meaning *per se* but to the discovery of form that makes meaning possible.

Both schools dwell on the specific nature of literary language. Whereas New Critics hold literary language in opposition to the language of science and of practical discourse, Formalists like Roman Jakobson define ‘literariness’ by insisting on the poetic function of language. However, Formalists rely more on overarching organizational principles such as fabula, syuzhet, metaphor, metonymy or on specific mode of literary representation–defamiliarisation. On the other hand, “the principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language...and the explicative procedure is to analyse the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols”(A *Glossary of literary Terms*).

However, whether or not one dwells on the ‘origin’ of meaning or exploration of meaning through interrelationship of verbal entities that constitute the text, one must invariably seal off experiences of the external world, and read the text itself

carefully. Hence, both groups adopt a habit of ‘close reading’.

We must also note that the Formalists, unlike the New Critics, confer a greater amount of scientific enquiry to the study of literature. This can be better understood when we read M. H. Abrams. He says: “Unlike the European Formalists...the New Critics did not apply the science of linguistics to poetry’ and their emphasis was not on a work as constituted by linguistic devices for achieving specifically literary effects, but on the complex interplay within a work of ironic, paradoxical, and metaphoric meanings around a humanly important theme.”

5.3 Important Figures

Discussion of New Criticism is never complete without any reference to its major exponents whose contributions not only enriched the contemporary critical scenario but also formed the grounds of later developments in literary and critical theory. New Criticism reacts against some earlier critical habits such as historicist reading and expressionist notion of art that characterizes Romantic criticism. Key figures of this critical movement were John Crowe Ransom, I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke, R.P. Blackmur, William Empson, Yvor Winters, W.K. Wimsatt, among others. To be more precise, New Criticism denotes a practice of reading evolved by I.A. Richards. In fact it was ‘practical criticism’ initiated by Richards that was carried forward by the New Critics and its impact can be seen in their exclusive textual orientation. Following is a list of the significant names and their contributions.

5.3.1 I. A. Richards: (1893-1979)

I.A. Richards was an important figure in the 20th century critical scenario. Once, he distributed in the classroom some papers containing poems (where names of the poets were withheld) and asked students to critically evaluate them. Such an undertaking might seem commonplace to you, but it was indeed a formidable task then because it inspired a direct, ‘unmediated’ encounter between the literary text and the critical reader. It was principally because of I.A. Richards that scientific objectivity became the hallmark of New Criticism.

Born in Sandbach, Cheshire, in 1893, I.A. Richards was educated at Clifton College. It was Cabby Spence who inspired in him an interest for literature. Richards did not have any formal training when he began his career. We must mention C. K. Ogden who was Richard’s collaborator throughout his intellectual pursuits. Richard, Ogden and James Wood co-authored *Foundations of Aesthetics*, where they mapped the principles of aesthetic reception. Another outstanding work by Richards and Ogden was *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language and of the Science of Symbolism*. The earlier phase of his critical works focused on meaning, comprehension and communication. *Principles of Literary Criticism* by Richards is a reaction against a time when there was nothing but “an echo of critical theories”. The book is an expression of the enthusiasm he felt for science and the scientific mode of enquiry. *Practical Criticism*, another work by Richards, had a pedagogic necessity as it promoted a particular method of teaching literature in many Anglo-American universities, and inspired the practice of ‘close-reading’ in subsequent critical developments. Richards, as Basil Willy states, founded the modern schools of New Criticism.

Richards contributed a good number of terms to literary criticism. He set in currency such terms as ‘stock responses’, ‘pseudo-statements’, ‘bogus entities’, distinction between ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’, terms like ‘referential’, ‘referent’, ‘ambiguity’, etc. The term ‘ambiguity’ was a negative marker, and was used in a pejorative sense in earlier criticism. It was Richards who put it to use in a non-pejorative way, asserting that ambiguity is a basic trait of language itself. William Empson, who was a student of Richards, expounded the term in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

5.3.2 William Empson: (1906-1984)

Empson, as S. Ramaswami and V. S. Sethuraman have said, is “perhaps the first analytical critic to apply the principles of I.A. Richards on the nature and function of language consistently and with gusto to particular passages of poetry.”

Empson emphasized a linguistic analysis of literary texts. He maintains that a particular word does not have a single meaning but a cluster of meanings. His “seven types of ambiguity” shows careful analysis of small units of a text (word, line, sentence, etc.). Empson insists on alternative readings and states that ambiguity is characteristic of poetic and literary language. He meticulously probes into texts like *Othello*, and *Paradise Lost* and explores multiple meanings of certain key words found in the text, making use of the dictionary and knowledge of historical semantics.

I.A. Richards’s principles regarding the nature and function of criticism, was first applied to poetry by Empson. In the *English Critical Tradition*, he is regarded as one of the sharpest and the most sensitive of modern critics. *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is the name of the critical treaty which makes Empson one of the leading New Critics.

5.3.3 Allen Tate: (1899-1979)

Allen Tate belongs to the Southern group of American critics. Whereas I.A. Richards separates referential and emotive function of language, Tate distinguishes between scientific and literary discourses. This distinction can also explain the distinction between New Criticism and Russian Formalism. If both schools share the view that a literary work is the proper object of study, the Russian Formalists' scientific study of literature goes against the New Critics' insistence on the irreducible and ontologically different experience of literature.

In a way, Tate's criticism is eclectic; he reconciles Richards, Cleanth Brooks and R.P. Warren. He draws on Richards' idea of reconciliation of opposed and harmonious elements, Brooks' concept of irony, and Warren's view that a poetic proposition has nothing to do with intellectual and rational scrutiny.

5.3.4 John Crowe Ransom: (1888-1974)

Ransom was a pioneering figure of New Criticism in America. He had a remarkable influence on contemporary American critics through the literary journal *Kenyon Review* (Ransom edited *Kenyon Review* for 20 years). He repudiated various forms of literary criticism including impressionism in favour of an ontological approach to critical issues. To Ransom, the function of criticism is the elucidation of literary works. Most notable among the critical works by Ransom are *The New Criticism* and *The World as Body*.

Both works contain important manifestoes of New Criticism. In an essay titled "Criticism, Inc.", for instance, he states certain basic principle of this school; he expresses his aim to make literary criticism "more scientific or precise and systematic". He underlines the importance of a critical shift from historicism to aesthetic

appreciation. His critique of left-wing criticism and humanism is caused by their adherence to moral criticism. Historical and biographical information are not irrelevant either, but they must help to define the 'aesthetic' of literature. *The History of Literary Criticism* mentions some normative principles characteristic of New Criticism, as set by Ransom. For him, criticism should exclude

- (a) Personal impressions
- (b) Synopsis and paraphrase
- (c) Historical studies
- (d) Linguistic studies (involving allusion, word-meaning, etc.)
- (e) Moral content

Ransom further asserts that poetry is ontologically different and hence irreducible to prose-meaning.

Stop to Consider:

Ransom's view of the distinctive nature of poetic experience can also be understood through the distinction he makes between 'texture' and 'structure' of a poem. The structure is the argument of the poem seen as a whole. 'Texture' is constituted by elements that have local value and affect the overall shape of the poem. The 'texture' does not easily give rise to the 'structure' but rather impedes it. It complicates whatever argument the poet is going to establish. As a result "in the end we have our logic but only after a lively reminder of the aspects of reality with which logic cannot cope."

The term 'Texture' is actually derived from the plastic arts which denotes the surface quality of a work, as opposed to its shape and structure. As applied in modern literary criticism, it thus designates the concrete qualities of a poem as opposed to its idea: thus the verbal surface of a work, its sensuous qualities and the density of its imagery.

.5.3.5 William Wimsatt, Jr. (1907-1975) and Monroe C. Beardsley (1915-1985)

Wimsatt, a professor of English at Yale University, contributed to New Criticism with such works as *The Prose Style of Dr. Johnson*, *Philosophic Words*, *The Verbal Icon* and *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (with Cleanth Brooks). Beardsley was a professor of philosophy and his works included *Practical Logic*, *Aesthetics*, *An Introduction to Philosophic Thinking*.

The most notable contributions of both critics are found in essays titled *The Intentional Fallacy* and *The Affective Fallacy*. These were controversial papers which elaborated a basic tenet of New Criticism: the issue of authorial intention and affect on the reader. ‘Intention’ and ‘Affect’ must be avoided in criticism because they are not implicated in the text itself. If a poem expresses certain thoughts and attitudes, they can be ascribed to the ‘dramatic speaker’ or ‘persona’ of the poem and not to the biographical author. Therefore, in critical discourse, terms such as sincerity, authenticity, originality need to be replaced by terms like integrity, relevance, unity, function because it is the literary work which is the sole object of critical scrutiny.

However, they reject Richards’ attempt to distinguish ‘emotive’ from ‘referential’ meaning, because describing emotive meaning would result in affective relativism, which would give a license to disregard the cognitive meaning of a poem.

Check Your Progress

1. Outline the main concerns of the New Critical advocacy of textual “close reading”.

2. Highlight the extent of the similarities between New Criticism and the Formalists. In what sense are both schools proponents of the ‘poem’? In what way do they differ?

5.4 Key Concepts

5.4.1 Autonomy of The Text

The New Critics were oriented towards “close-reading” or ‘practical reading’ in the line laid down by I.A. Richards. A text, because it is constituted by a unique language, is itself a source of its meaning and value, and is thus distinguished from other texts or other uses of language. A poem is an embodied experience inextricably bound up with language, and hence its meaning cannot be conveyed by prose paraphrase.

Scientific and poetic truths are different in nature. Scientific truth is propositional and can be shown to be true or false. Literary/poetic truth is not ‘scientific’ in the sense that it is not susceptible to the norms of truth and falsehood. Still, critical endeavour is scientific. In the Romantic period, it is the poet who is the locus of meaning and significance (Remember Wordsworth’s oft quoted definition of poetry as ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’). Now poetry is said to have its own territory, its own unique mode of existence. The poem is seen by New Critics as a self-contained, self-sustaining entity. The poem, and not its relation to the external world, is the focus and object of criticism.

The New Critics’ consensus on the object of critical analysis leads to the divorce between a literary work and its diverse contexts provided by history, biography, sociology and other disciplines.

New Critical method relies on a basic empirical principle that man is the observer of external objects, and, therefore, can publicly

formulate abstractions on the ‘perceived’ event/object. To isolate a work from its wider socio-historical context is to assume that the work is subjected to ‘scientific’ analysis (In a sense this recalls ‘scientific’ practice that isolates an object written in a controlled environment, in order to observe).

Stop to Consider

According to John Locke, knowledge comes from two sources (i) ideas coming from experience and (ii) reflection, or the ability to look at one’s own mind. Now, a poem as an external object can be analyzed objectively, while its content concerns what is going on in the mind of the poet/reader. Hence, poetry performs a mimetic function that embodies the result of reflection on the mind. These questions cannot be described scientifically, but through a poetic structure.

The above discussion shows that although New Criticism is based on empirical philosophy, in a way it also dismisses rigorous scientific methodology in grasping poetic/textual truth.

5.4.2 Intentional Fallacy

“The Intentional Fallacy” by W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley is a foundational text of New Criticism which states that ‘intention’ should not be brought to bear upon the analysis of the literary text. What do we understand by the term ‘Intention’? The authors state, “intention, as we shall use the term, corresponds to what he intended in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance...In order to judge the poem’s performance, we must know what he intended. Intention is designed or planned in the

author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write."

Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that knowledge of an author's original intention is neither integral to, nor essential in the critical analysis of a work. One can interpret a text without any reference to 'authorial intention'. Their claim here is two-fold:

- (i) Authorial intentions are not available in the text.
- (ii) Notion of authorial intention dismantles the integrity of a literary work.

However, 'intention' cannot be so easily dispensed with. Have the authors completely denied the very notion of "Authorial intention"? We must know that they distinguished between the intention realized in the text and that which is supposed to exist prior to the existence of the text. When intention is realized, it is useless to consult the author because "critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle".

Again, 'intention' cannot be the standard for critical evaluation of a text. Meaning can be deciphered only through a 'close' analysis of the text, attending to its linguistic as well as rhetorical components. Of course, all meanings cannot be said to be free from authorial intention. In conversation, for instance, what the speaker intends prior to his utterance is crucial to meaning of the utterance. Literary meaning resists such dependence on the psychology of the author. "The Intentional Fallacy" also contends that a text can have meanings unacknowledged by the author. Hence, author cannot be a guide to interpretation of a text because interpretation must be justified textually.

There is both external and internal evidence for a work's meaning. Internal evidence can be found in "the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through

grammars, diction, arise and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture” (*Literary Theory and Criticism*, 181).

External evidence is private, and not part of the work, and it comes from journals, letters, conversation etc. However, Wimsatt and Beardsley could not sharply demarcate these two kinds of evidence, because the author’s expressed meaning and intention can get incorporated into the text through its linguistic texture.

SAQ:

How would you name the ‘authorial intention’ behind the ‘Sunne Rising’ by Donne? Would this ‘intention’ help us to understand the poem better? (70+70 words)

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5.4.3 Affective Fallacy

As used by Wimsatt and Beardsley (*The Verbal Icon*, 1954), this term connotes ‘a confusion between the poem and its result (what it is and what it does)’. Judgment of a literary text should not rest upon the effect it has on the readers. ‘Affective fallacy’ is thus a confusion between a poem and its “affect” on readers. A text, however emotive its context might be, must nevertheless be judged as a text, or a self-sufficient entity. It must be seen as a system of language. So, evaluating a work of art in terms of its results in the mind of the readers is supposed to be a critical error.

Eliot's "objective correlative" predates this principle. As explained by Eliot, emotions are externalized into a poem not as emotions but in the form of some events and situation, specific to the emotion as judging a poem from emotion results in impressionism.

5.4.4 Irony and Paradox

Irony indicates a 'verbal situation' where the expressed meaning differs from its implied meaning. A number of New Critics used this term and it was seen as a general criterion of affixing literary value to a work of art. We can in this context, point to T. S. Eliot who endorsed metaphysical poetry for its use of wit. To Eliot, wit is 'internal equilibrium' and 'involves' a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience..." (*The English Critical Tradition*, 197-198). In the same vein, I.A. Richards contends that in any aesthetic experience, the rivalry of conflicting impulses is avoided as they are given autonomy. He also distinguishes between 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' in poetry, defining irony as a touchstone for the poetry of exclusion: "Irony consists in bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses; that is why poetry which is exposed to it is not of the highest order, and why irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry" (*Literary Criticism: A Short History*).

Cleanth Brooks elaborates Richards' idea in his essay "Irony as a Principle of Structure". Poetic statements, Brooks states, can aspire for musicality only through particular, concrete details. In poetry, general meaning is qualified by the particular "the concrete particulars with which the poet loads himself seems to deny the universal to which he aspires", (*The English Critical Tradition*, 472). Brooks further states that "the obvious warping of a statement by the context" we characterize as 'ironical'. Critics like Brooks

would even like to suggest that the ‘language of poetry is the language of paradox’. This idea has been persuasively elaborated by Brooks in his book *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947).

SAQ:

How is the difference between form and content apparent in a poem like Blake’s “The Tyger”? To what extent does the content forge structure of the poem? (60 + 60 words)

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5.4.5 Ambiguity

William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a fundamental text of New Criticism. The title is misleading, because it seeks to ‘categorize’ different types of ambiguity. But what it purports to say is clear: words have multiple meanings. Besides, English syntax is flexible to adjustments of the written and colloquial word order.

Because of its unique organization of language, poetry can cover an indecision which finds an echo in the mind of the reader. Such indecision stems from the reconciliation of contradictory impulses.

Although Empson offers a classification of ambiguity, his contribution to the study of poetry is not in classification, but in the way he offers a close and acute analysis of the linguistic elements with an eye on the many-sidedness of language. Of course, ambiguity can be a nuisance if “it is due to weakness or thinness of thought”, “impression of incoherence”. Real ambiguity adds complexity and richness to poetry.

In relation to the question of multiple meanings, Empson states that a reader must know the forces that work in the mind of the author, or how it appeared to its first readers. So, knowledge of the history of language, the author’s conscious or unconscious intention as well as the reaction of the first readers— are all keys to an understanding of ambiguity.

SAQ:

“She is all states, and all princes, I” How would you categorize the figurative language here—metaphor, ambiguity, or irony? Give reasons for your answer. (100 words)

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5.4.6 Metaphor

Metaphor implies a comparison between two dissimilar things, where comparison is not anticipated. In fact, terms like metaphor, irony, and tension are widely used in New Criticism because they are all about the intrinsic properties of a literary text.

I.A. Richards has it that meaning originates from a specific context within a text. But contrary to this, metaphor exemplifies how the contexts merge. Metaphorical meaning is therefore not a version of literal meaning or “simply a prettified version of an already stated meaning” (*Literary Criticism: A Short History*, 644), but that which occupies a new, distinctive ground, adding to the richness of poetry. Richards contends that it is the link with a second context that

determines that a given usage is metaphorical. Richards introduces the term ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’, ‘tenor’ indicating the subject and ‘vehicle’, the metaphorical term linked to the ‘tenor’. However, metaphor does not mean either ‘tenor’ or ‘vehicle’, but a third entity that stems from their link. Resisting traditional notions of ‘displacement of words’, Richards sees metaphor as a transaction of two contexts, and its value is thus, never ornamental.

Stop to Consider

Equally important are Ezra Pound’s and Eliot’s ideas of metaphor which, they think, are the essence of poetry. To Pound, metaphor, which is synonymous with idiographic method, is juxtaposition of picturable elements. Eliot’s view of metaphor is influenced by the metaphysical poets as well as the 19th century French symbolist poets. He writes of the metaphysical poets that they forcibly unify heterogeneous ideas in their minds. These poets, he writes, put together incongruous elements and unify what normally resists unification. The amalgamation of disparate elements is crucial, as it leads to the unification of thought and feeling. When thought and feeling remain separate, metaphor becomes non-structural, a mere ornament or an illustration of something. Thus New Critics see metaphor as a constitutive principle of poetry.

5.4.7 Tension

You have now seen that to the New Critics, poetry does not yield unambiguous, objective truth. This, according to them, is the inevitable result of the way in which materials and images are organized in the poetic text. Seen in this way, tension is a general characteristic of poetry. I. A. Richards holds that any experience

includes various impulses, but in poetic experience “the rivalry of conflicting impulses is avoided not by our suppressing the impulses, but, paradoxically by our giving them free reign.” What is the consequence of such a free reign of opposing impulses? “Such a conception, presenting its difficulties for an equilibrium of conflicting impulses is easily confused with the state of balance that one finds in irresolution—that is, an oscillation between two sets of opposed impulses in which the mind, like the fabled donkey poised between the equally attractive bales of hay, can only remain suspended in inaction.

In an essay, “Tension in Poetry” Allen Tate uses the term in a special sense. A poem has both denotative and connotative meaning. “In poetry, words have not only their denotative meanings but also their connotative significance. To indicate the logical meaning and the denotative aspects of language Tate used the word ‘extension’. To refer to the suggestive and the connotative aspect of language, he uses the word ‘Intension’. “A successful poem is one in which these two sets of meaning are in a state of ‘Tension’”.

Stop to Consider

Denotation and Connotation

Denotation is the most literal meaning of a word, regardless of what one feels about it or the various ideas and suggestions it connotes. For example, the word apartheid denotes a certain form of political, social, and racial regime. But it *connotes* much more than that because connotation refers to the suggestions and implications evoked by a word or a phrase. Connotation may be personal or individual, general or universal. Probably all existing words with lexical meaning can have various connotations.

5.4.8 Organic Form/Unity

The idea of organic unity finds echo in Romantic critical thought. According to Coleridge, a literary work must have an organic form which develops from inside the work itself. A poem is like a growing plant that achieves the organic unity of its different parts with the whole. The New Critics carry forward this argument and shows how the totality of meanings of a work is constituted by the interrelations of various elements within it. Consequently, the significance of other New Critical terms finds a vent in the idea of organic unity to produce totality in effect.

5.5 Summing Up

What makes New Criticism significant can be summarized as follows:

1. It institutionalizes the study of literature and establishes it as a self-sufficient academic discipline.
2. It also promotes a particular reading practice: the habit of “close reading.”

Of course, the basic theoretical premises of this school have been variously contested in subsequent periods. New Criticism’s implicit assumption about the high cultural values embedded in English literary culture was debunked with ‘Culture studies’ emerging as a new discipline along with the advent of post-modernism, where moral and ethical barriers are sought to be resolved, hierarchies of aesthetic works are destabilized, in order to pave the way for an open study of multifarious cultural phenomenon. For example, New Historicism, which opts for the historical and social elements as important source of literary speculation, is in sharp reaction to the insular and textual reading upheld by New Criticism. New

Historicism insists on a dynamic text, context and dialogue in the production of meaning and value of literature. In fact, the theoretical movements such as Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction. Post colonialism, Feminism, Cultural Studies and New Historicism that started from the 1960s onwards began as a reaction against the basic principles and ideas of New Criticism.

5.6 References and Suggested Readings

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UNIT- 6

NEW HISTORICISM

Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives**
- 6.2 Introduction**
- 6.3 Defining New Historicism**
- 6.4 Literature's Link to Culture**
- 6.5 Culture as a Text**
- 6.6 Textuality of History/ Historicity of Text**
- 6.7 Other Key Points**
- 6.8 Summing Up**
- 6.9 References and Suggested Reading**

6.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to

- *Gain* a basic idea of new historicism
- *Identify* the basic principles of new historicist approach
- *Evaluate* the concept of history from new historical perspective
- *Approach* a literary text with a new historicist approach.

6.2 Introduction

New historicism denotes an approach to literature or a mode of critical practice that emerged in 1980s with figures such as Jonathan Goldberg, Louis Montrose, Jean Howard, Joel Fineman and Stephen Greenblatt. Greenblatt, the most distinguished practitioner and exponent of this mode, talked about it in a 1982 periodical, *Genre*, and the term gained currency ever since. In an article published in a 1980 Journal, *Diacritics*, Michel McCannles first used the term 'new

historicism' in the context of the Renaissance culture and how it was heterogeneous and consisted of a multiplicity of signifying codes.

Both as a critical approach and a critical practice , new historicism entered the domain of literary study in the aftermath of structuralism, post structuralism , deconstruction and incorporated important theoretical insights of Michel Foucault. It starts off with the premise that a literary text originates in the peculiar climate of its production and circulation, or the product of a historical situation. However, this historical situation is seen in traditional historicism as a fixed backdrop against which the text comes into existence. In contrast, history is seen as a matter of reconstruction through deep engagement with textuality. Textuality of history and historicity of text is a central tenet of New Historicism.

6.3 Defining New Historicism

New historicism is a mode of literary study that deals with the historical and cultural conditions of the production, circulation and reception of a literary text. However, these 'conditions' are not given or fixed, nor is a text just a pretext to. It delves into issues beyond the text. New historicism, then, is based on the premise that literature is situated in a wider culture. Literary text is situated within the totality of culture comprising institutions, practices and values/discourses. The text is not just a product of culture: it interacts with the elements of culture both as a producer and a product of meaning and energy.

The term 'new historicism' calls for some elaboration. In the first place, it marks a departure from earlier form of historicism involved in the study of literature. Secondly, we need to examine whether its exponents used the term to refer to a consistent methodology of 'doing' literature. Or, does new historicism is a distinctive school of

criticism like new criticism?

Further, as I have mentioned its focus on 'historical and cultural conditions of the production, circulation and reception of a literary text', new historicism also suggests studies somewhat akin to 'sociology of literature, but eventually it established itself as a literary approach directed to the study of a literary text.

Is new historicism a literary theory? Stephen Greenblatt and others seek to define new historicism as a form of critical practice rather than a theory. They did not attach a single methodology to this 'practice'. Neither did they set a set of questions which can be posed while reading a literary text. Their focus was the literary text and their concern was representation. Therefore, new historicism was basically a kind of literary criticism rather than literary theory, (though the 'new historicists', by their own confession, are intensely fascinated by theory that emanated from various paces of Europe.

New historicism represents a group of people from various disciplines who converged on a journal, "Representations", the plural form demonstrates that they are not concerned with a single, overarching form of representation but understood literature as a site of contesting representations. (part of the reason why they refused to theorise their practice is their consciousness of their location in time and space) Of course we can identify a set of basic premises on which their critical practice was dependant. One such premise is that literature is not just a part of culture. It is to the last point that we now move.

6.4 Literature's Link to Culture

An important methodological aspect of this critical practice can be understood through a conceptualization of literature's link to

culture. A text cannot be situated within a pre-given historical and cultural backdrop. 'Situating' literature is an important undertaking, requiring as it does a fair amount of creative and critical labour. One would say that the 'backdrop' must be 'reconstructed'. Reconstruction implies givenness of historical reality, something that existed in the past; it ignores the fact of history's availability only in the form of textuality. "Textuality of history and historicity of text", a phrase used by Louis Montrose, describes a basic tenet of new historicism. History is available to us in the form of textuality. A related question is that of historical materials and the disciplinary boundary between literature and history. Post-structuralist notion of the text has already destabilized such distinctions. Till then, however, a basic disciplinary hierarchy between literary and non-literary discourses existed, something that stems from the Formalist movements. New Historicism puts all text produced in a given historical period on the same footing. In new historicists' works we see all variety of writing assume an equal importance: anecdote, travel writing, religious sermon, book on etiquette, philosophical text, a government report, a diary or journal. All texts are embedded within the totality of culture. embeddedness does not imply simple sheltering; it suggests that values and ideals produced in a culture are negotiated in the texts. further, culture is not a given totality; it is seen as a text. This assumption of culture as a text is crucial because it opens up possibilities of meaning but what do we mean by culture as a text?

6.5 Culture as a Text

The notion of culture as a text also widened the range of objects that can be studied. The object of study is not major works of literature and art alone, but include diverse kinds of writing and images. This

caused a major shift in the focus of literary study. As the field of inquiry is broadened, refiguring of literary canon and relations with minor writings was possible. This practice of cultural analysis already gained currency in the U.S. in the late 1960s and 1970s which resulted in the inclusion of diverse marginalized groups such as the Jews, African Americans, Hispanics and women, and so on—an obvious move towards democratizing.

Defining of culture as a text must be read in a post-structuralist critical ethos. Text in the poststructuralist sense invokes movement and circulation of meaning in a network. Culture is thus a network where all kinds of discourse—philosophical, religious, legal, social, literary—move and circulate. But there are basically two modes of discourses that operate in the field of culture—traditional and subversive. Traditional discourses are often handmaidens of status quo while subversive discourses resist the dominant forces of culture and society. A literary text is a site for contestation of contending discourses, and not an organic unity where all contradictions are reconciled or dissolved.

Textuality of culture does not evade questions of human experience. The New historicists start with an empirical position: encounter with literature which has a human core. Literature confronts us with men and women, their thinking, desires, hopes, aspirations, and all possible range of experience. The experiential nature of literature has not been dispensed with, though new historicists did not endorse the idea of organic unity. People do not live under the canopy of a single, harmonious culture. As has been pointed out, the notion of culture as text is a hermeneutic necessity for the critic. Authors cannot take a distant, objective position from his own culture; he is implicated in it. Thus, an author cannot fully grasp his own meaning. The new historicist position is distant enough to grasp the text, its author, and the whole cultural context, yet close enough to

see the text's difference. Two dominant areas on which the new historicists have worked are 'Renaissance Theatre' and 'romantic literature'—two completed phases of British culture whose power structures cannot affect a present scholar. So long as the author is implicated in a relation of power within a culture, she cannot fully grasp the implications of his own work. From this, it is clear that we cannot provide a new historicist reading of a contemporary as we cannot extricate ourselves from a living relation of power. (Taslima Nasrin is a good example of this.)

Culture as a text has another meaning. A culture presents itself through a whole range of diverse expressions: it is not an undifferentiated substance. Culture is constituted through diverse forms of expressions through which we identify people living in a particular time and place. Artistic expression is only one among a whole range of creative expressions in a culture.

6.6 Textuality of History/ Historicity of Text:

This phrase is articulated by Louis Montrose in his essay "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture". Let me quote the full sentence: "The Post-structuralist orientation to history now emerging in literary studies may be characterized chiastically, as a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (Montrose 588). By historicity of text, Montrose denotes the text as culturally specific product and one embedded in society—all kinds of texts, not just the literary. Historicity of texts says that texts are located in specific historical and cultural situation. It also means that the readers reading the text (for instance, a twenty first century Indian woman scholar emerging from a Dalit background reading the early seventeenth century text of Shakespeare,) read the text through specific configurations of

critical discourses and theories of the present time. Historicity of the text refers to historical situation of both the text and the reader. 'Textuality of history' implies that history is not readily available to us, except through the mediation of texts. We have no access to an authentic past, a lived totality of the material existence of a past society. We are dependant upon the textual traces of that society in our historical pursuits. Whether these are authentic documents of the past is a matter of textual engagement. Another implication of textuality of history is illustrated by Hayden White when he argues that historical work is structured like a narrative.

Let me illustrate White's argument here. Historical work is not necessarily a 'true' account of historical reality. Rather, it involves a negotiation between what he calls the 'historical field', the unprocessed records, the historian's account and the audience. This reconciliatory or mediatory aspect of historical work is crucial for understanding of history as a narrative artefact. The unprocessed historical record is not a historical work, because it is just a body of facts and figures which have not been evaluated or given specific meaning. It is by using this record in the historical account that a specific data, otherwise not meaningful, that the historian imposes on it certain meaning and significance.

Further, as White contends, The events are arranged into a chronicle, and the chronicle is arranged into a story which involves a discernible beginning, middle and end. The events are evaluated, given a degree of prominence, made into an inaugural, terminating or transitional motif. A transitional motif keeps reader's expectation on hold, while terminating motif signals the end of a phenomenon or a state of affairs. Chronicles are open ended; they have no inaugurations.

The 'story' character of historical work is not denied by traditional historians, only these 'stories' are said to be discovered by the

historians, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his stories. But as Hayden White contends, historians also 'invent' the story. Historians deal with the narratorial questions such as 'how did it happen? What happen next'etc. this question of 'how' of an event or a historical action allows the historian to choose a genre in which he would anchor his account, as a tragedy or comedy etc.

Check Your Progress:

Are 'historicity of the text'and 'textuality of history'one and the same thing? Elaborate. (in 150 words)

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6.7 Other Key Points:

- **Representation:** representation is a major concern. New historicists were a group of people from various disciplines who converged on a journal, Representation. They studied literature and their concern was representation. As they reject the idea of a single, overarching, unified representation, and argue that literature is a site of contesting representations. A literary artist is embedded in a culture and its power structure, she has a peculiar power of representation. And it is the capacity to manipulate the materials of culture through re-imagining, re-visiting and performing in a differently imagined totality artists can assemble and shape the forces of culture within a new totality in ways that can have unexpected implications. Greenblatt refers to Shakespeare's The Tempest here. The play draws on an aspect of Renaissance culture: exploration of the new

world. He re-articulates a colonial argument by creating the all-powerful character of Prospero, but renders his legitimacy less clear. Juxtaposition of Caliban and Prospero exemplify how varied materials can be combined, contrasting representations can be juxtaposed to create unexpected political meaning.

- **What is a Literary Text:**

Literary text is cultural not because it points to an overarching structure that exists beyond it but because it absorbs values and practices of a culture. As values and practices are not static, limits of culture are also not fixed. It is always subject to improvisation and adjustments. Literature reproduces, shapes and articulates such adjustments and introduces variations. This brings in the issue of cultural mobility. Greenblatt shows that mobility involves exchange of material goods, ideas and people. Exchange does not take place at random; there are prevailing codes that govern exchange and mobility in culture. A text is not a sovereign entity; it borrows materials from outside. Existence of culture depends on exchange of material goods, ideas and people. A text itself effects a set of exchanges, negotiations, and network of trade: a subtle process of give and take. Greenblatt gives a thoroughly materialist account of such transactions that happen surrounding the text.

- **Transactions, Negotiations, Exchange:** These typical terms employed by Greenblatt to suggest a movement of cultural materials from one zone to another which happens not according to exclusive whims of the artist/creator.

How does the idea of ‘moving the materials’ hold good in Elizabethan theatre which is believed to be intangible and to hold ‘the mirror up to nature’? Theatre was supposed to represent things faithfully and accurately. In reality, Greenblatt argues, there are many modes of material exchange that occur behind this seemingly innocuous theatrical representation. Even as ‘negotiation’ or ‘transaction’ does not seem to apply to the realm of language, they do. For instance, Shakespeare is a glaring example of how language of diverse classes or groups could be appropriated and assimilated on to the artistic plain. Stories are freely available which were abundantly used by playwrights. Stage properties and costumes had to be purchased. Inventories with high symbolic value in the hierarchical Tudor society had a high price. Verbal exchange became a substitute for erotic action.

As has already been hinted at, culture accommodates conflicts and contestations of forces there are unconscious regulations of coherence, while there are resistance as well. It seems to exemplify a basic insight of deconstruction. To a deconstructionist, however, the irreconcilable contradictions within a text are product of textuality. New historicists explain them in socio-historical terms. Yet, new historicists do not offer a theory of literature. They establish dynamic relations between the literary and non-literary texts, yet they stick to some notion of literariness. They argue that all traces of a culture do not bear equal degree of resonance. Close attention to the literary traces (formal and linguistic) is a new critical legacy of new historicism. Of course, the ‘close reading’ is directed to a new focus: it illuminates the hazy and dimly lit margins instead of its illuminated centre, and a delusive craze for ‘total reading’ is avoided.

Stop to Consider:

Here are some of the important points we need to consider:

- Does New historicism essentially involve the reader's understanding of what happened in the time in which the text was present? Does it allow us to see a text as clues to the 'event' as such? In that case the critic essentially involves herself in a kind of historiographical project. New historicism is not a historiographical project. Rather, it sensitizes us to how the said event is described or narrated or represented.
- History is not a body of available knowledge which is already there for us to grasp. Rather, history is embedded in all kinds of writing produced in a given time in the past. This sensitivity to the existence of all kinds of writing in a given historical time implies that all kinds of texts are now placed on equal footing.
- And this leads us to another crucial tenet of new historicism : that is , it rejects the continually policed boundaries of the literary and non-literary texts, categories fervently upheld by the formalists. Its destabilization of the hierarchy of literary and non-literary writing is thoroughly in sync with poststructuralism and deconstruction.
- When all texts are placed on equal footing, subjected to critic's interpretation, it enables the critic to make uncanny and often startling connections between various kinds of texts. A novel of Charles Dickens, a piece of sermon, a self-help book, a political pamphlet or a popular magazine of the time can now be brought into startling connections. All of these historically situated texts are product of a culture and speak in various ways about the institutions, practices and discourses.
- Literature is not just seen as part of history; it is also seen to be part of culture. Of course understanding of culture now is radically different from Arnoldian notion of culture: repository of the best that has been handed down in a tradition. Culture is a domain where circulation of power and operation of various kinds of contrary, conflicting discourses is central. Now all of

these figure in various ways-directly or indirectly—in the texts produced in a given historical culture. For instance, if we look at the theme of marriage in Victorian fiction, we can think beyond mere artistic modes of its representation in the text and explore the institution of marriage and various kinds of discourses associated with it such as love, transgression, punishment of sexual indulgence beyond marriage. It leads us to a more political question of power, politics, sexual morality, status of women and so on.

- In this way, in a very interesting way, new historicism brings into critical practices such diverse elements as form, language, metaphor, politics.

Check Your Progress:

1. How do we determine the limits of a given culture? How do we know that there is something called “Renaissance culture”?(40 words)

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2.Does new historicism dislodge all canonical literature? (50 words)

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3. What is new historicism’s relationship to Marxism? (60 words)

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4. Is ‘reconstruction of the background’ a problematic project? (60 words)

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5. How is history useful to a new historicist?(80 words)

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6.8 Summing Up:

New Historicism, as a critical practice, is grounded in the premise that a literary text emerges from, and is inextricably linked to, the historical conditions of its production and circulation. However, this historical condition is not a transparent, pre-existing reality that a critic can directly access. Instead, it must be reconstructed through a complex textual operation involving various levels of written and cultural texts.

New Historicism marks a clear departure from the formalist approach of New Criticism, which emphasizes close reading while detaching the text from its historical and political contexts. It also diverges from the more textualist focus of structuralism and poststructuralism by foregrounding the role of power, politics, and resistance in the production and reading of literature.

A central theoretical insight of New Historicism is the reconceptualization of culture itself—not as a collection of isolated artifacts, but as a vast network of interrelated discourses, including the literary, religious, legal, philosophical, and political. This shift enables critics to view literature as both shaped by and shaping the broader cultural matrix in which it exists.

Louis Montrose’s phrase, “the textuality of history and the historicity of text,” captures the core principle of New Historicist thinking. Texts are embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts, and our understanding of history is always mediated

through texts. This idea aligns with Hayden White's argument that historical narratives are themselves constructed and shaped by rhetorical and narrative forms.

New Historicism also challenges the notion of unified, coherent representation, particularly in relation to identity categories such as gender. Literary texts are often shaped by multiple, sometimes conflicting, discourses circulating within a culture, resulting in representations that are layered, negotiated, and contradictory.

Finally, New Historicism emphasizes the dynamic interplay between literary and non-literary texts. Culture is seen as a site of continuous negotiation, transaction, and exchange across different domains of knowledge and art. This negotiatory character underscores the fluid and interactive relationship between texts and their historical and cultural environments, reinforcing the idea that literature is deeply embedded in the lived experiences, desires, and aspirations of individuals within a society.

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UNIT- 7

MARXIST APPROACHES

Unit Structure:

- 7.1 Objectives**
- 7.2 Introduction**
- 7.3 Re-thinking Base-Superstructure Model**
- 7.4 Literature and Ideology**
- 7.5 Representation of Reality**
- 7.6 Marxist Literary Criticism: Key Points**
- 7.7 Summing Up**
- 7.8 References and Suggested Reading**

7.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *Gain* a general overview of the field of Marxist approaches to literature
- *Evaluate* base-superstructure model developed by Marxism
- *Write* about literature's link to ideology
- *Gain* a perspective on representation of reality and how frameworks change
- *Identify* the basic issues of Marxist Criticism

7.2 Introduction

Let us take up the term 'Marxist Approaches' in the first place. The term *Marxism* singularly invokes the thought of Karl Marx, and yet

the term *approaches* entails a plurality. Marxism does not provide a singular critical-theoretical framework for the study of art, literature, and culture. Here, we will look at how Marxism enables multiple critical positions vis-à-vis the phenomenon of literature. Without gaining some idea about the trajectory of Marxist thought since Marx and Engels, it would be difficult to understand these positions. You will be intrigued more, learning that Marx himself did not build up a system of literary criticism or formulate a complete theory of art. What we understand as a ‘Marxist’ position or framework is something built up later.

True that Marx wrote numerous commentaries on Western literature, as he was an avid reader of all sorts of literary writing, both canonical and marginal. His seminal work *Das Capital*, for instance, is replete with metaphors, literary allusions, and references. Yet, Marx never laid down any principles of literary criticism or illustrated the characteristics of literature or various literary genres, even though his study persisted across genres. But the idea of literature as a domain that belongs to the superstructure, coexisting with other domains such as philosophy, law, morality, and culture, is quintessentially Marxian. Beneath this superstructure lies the material and economic base. It entails that society in every historical epoch is sustained by the material forces and activities, and this material-economic base gives rise to what we understand as ‘literature’, and determines it.

In a society driven by feudal economy, like a medieval English society, the literary output (oral or written) is shaped by the underlying economic arrangement, and its ideology is the reflection of these material forces. Similarly, in a capitalist society, it is the capitalist mode of production and its inner conflicts that largely shape the ideology of its literature. This ‘base-superstructure’ model was contested and reconfigured later, as we will discuss, and

consequently, the idea of literature also changed. But what sustained is a broad notion of literature's link to the wider scenario of society, economy, polity, and history.

We know that New Criticism emerged in a big way with the idea of literature as an autonomous realm that has little truck with the non-literary affairs of society. But soon, this concept turned out to be dated. Secondly, it is not difficult to understand, in our post-structuralist climate offering multiple frameworks such as feminism, postcolonialism, ecocriticism and so on, that literary criticism cannot be any benign and neutral exercise. Study and interpretation of literary work is a political act, engaged in a sort of power structure and directed towards a political goal.

A basic impetus of this political dimension of literary affairs (writing, reading, interpreting) comes from a very important philosophical and political position of Marxism. Marx contends that the relation between matter and consciousness is not blandly deterministic but dialectical. Man's social existence determines his consciousness, but human consciousness also reacts back on the social materiality, transforming it in certain historical moments. In other words, man is a conscious agent of social transformation. Later theorists of Marxism, such as V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, reflected on the role that literature can play in social revolution and can be an instrument of class struggle. The idea of literary criticism, therefore, as a form of social praxis, cannot remain aloof from a large transformative objective.

7.3 Re-thinking Base-Superstructure model

Granted that literature must be considered within a broad socio-historical context. But to see literature as a passive product of the more important material process of economy is to pave the way for

a dogmatic understanding of literature. During the Soviet regime, literature was massively used for propaganda. It was based on the dogmatic perception of literature as a passive reflection of the economic base and a representation of the economic and class relations of society. This model largely downplayed the artistic and imaginative qualities of literature. In this framework, a bourgeois literary work, because it is necessarily an ideological reflection of the dominant mode of bourgeois production, is already doomed with bourgeois ideology and can never articulate an anti-bourgeois ethos.

Marx contends that productive forces and the relations of production form the base of any social system. Development of the productive forces brings certain relations of production into existence. For any society to sustain, there should be unity of both; but sometimes there arise contradictions between them. The productive forces are less determined by the relations of production; hence they have their own history of development, though other elements in the social system influence the productive forces. But if we consider the intellectual product of a particular historical period, it can be a material force of intellectual production of subsequent times.

If we go on exploring the economic basis of each and every ideological formation in an age, it would be more or less the same. In that case, we are not really exploring the distinctive traits of that product; we are basically trying to find and establish similarities among diverse works of art and literature in terms of a common economic basis. It is like reading Dickens and Hardy on an equal economic footing and saying they are essentially the same. It is like denying an intellectual formation its relative autonomy—the complex ways in which numerous factors in their various degrees mould the product.

Therefore, it is important to consider the fact that critics like Raymond Williams depart from such deterministic schemata. Raymond Williams's radical point of departure is the assertion that culture (or literature, for that matter) is materially produced. Williams does not deny the power of the economy in the sustenance of society, but his point is: it is not material goods or things, but the entire phenomenon of culture that is produced through material processes. The Industrial Revolution, for instance, is not a revolution created through inventions like the steam engine and the spinning jenny; it is also a revolution created through the steam press. It is as much a revolution in the production of printed material as it is in the production of clothes.

Hence, a literary text itself is materially produced, and is partly shaped by its material production, and is not a passive reflection of some more important activity in society that takes place earlier. The dialectical relationship between literature and society entails that literature, because of its materially produced quality, can exert its influence back on the social totality. Hywel Rowland Dix writes: "Literature must then be seen as an inextricable element of a much broader social process. It contributes to the making and contesting of a social whole. Without the Industrial Revolution we might say, no Dickens. But in a sense without Dickens, the kind of society that was produced by industrialisation would also be qualitatively different" (Raymond Williams 45).

Check Your Progress:

According to Raymond Williams, how is literature materially produced, and in what way does this view differ from the deterministic economic model of cultural production? (100 words)

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7.4 Literature and Ideology:

While Marx and Engels define ideology as a force of superstructure that corresponds to an economic base, the concept of ideology itself was central in Marxist discourse. Althusser's theory of ideology as an important, and it influenced a number of later critics and thinkers. Althusser expounds the operation of state through material-administrative and ideological means. The larger institutional forces such as the administrative, political and repressive forces. On the other hand ideological apparatuses (such as family, education, religion, culture) produce and perpetuate ideology to reproduce the condition of existence.

Althusser's concept of ideology had a significant influence on the subsequent Marxist tradition. He moves beyond viewing ideology as merely a product of the superstructure, emphasizing its necessity for reproducing the conditions of production. While bourgeois economists focus on the point of view of economic production, Althusser calls for a broader, more inclusive perspective. The reproduction of the conditions of production involves not only the reproduction of the means of production but also the maintenance of an entire economic network and order. Crucially, this includes the reproduction of productive forces. For production to sustain itself, these forces must be consistently made available, which highlights the critical role of institutions such as the church, schools, and other organizations. Ideology, and its reproduction, thus becomes one of the essential modes for maintaining the conditions of production.

Althusser elaborates on the role of the state in this context, distinguishing between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). While these apparatuses do not operate on exclusively repressive or ideological principles, these are their predominant functions. As the ruling class holds state power, it simultaneously exerts control over the ideological apparatuses, with ISAs playing a pivotal role in reproducing the relations of production. Drawing from the socio-political history of France, Althusser argues that education functions as a major ISA, illustrating how the church-family combination of earlier times was replaced by the school-family combination as the dominant ideological force shaping individuals. Schools impart know-how within the framework of a ruling ideology, embedding this ideology through teachings on morality and ethics. Althusser then shifts from the question of ideological apparatuses to the nature of ideology itself, proposing a general theory of ideology as fundamentally ahistorical. While the Marxist tradition often views ideology as a form of false consciousness, Althusser argues that ideology exists materially within various apparatuses and manifests through material practices. Most importantly, he asserts that the subject does not pre-exist ideology; rather, ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. The process of ideological operation involves recognizing individuals as subjects, analogous to hailing someone on the street. This operation appears almost instinctive, natural, and non-ideological.

Lucien Goldmann was Georg Lukacs's chief disciple. He examines how a text's structure embodies the structure of thought of the class the writer belongs to. More complete the articulation in the text of that vision, greater is the artistic merit of the work. A text, to Goldmann, is not the creation of an individual, as Macherey also demonstrates. This is Goldmann's "genetic structuralism". In fact,

Goldmann seeks to find a set of structural relationship between text, world-vision and history. Basically historical situation of a social group is transposed into the structure of a work. His kind of criticism requires a dynamic and dialectical relationship between these elements. Here Eagleton calls him not dialectical. Because world view is supposed to be the direct expression of a social class, which the text directly expresses. Complexities, discontinuities, ruptures are overlooked in this symmetrical study. In other words, he holds a rather mechanical view of literature's relation to society and ideology.

This mechanistic view, as well as totality-centred view expressed by Lukacs are refuted by Macherey, saying that a text is bound to ideology "through what it does not say"(Eagleton 32). The gaps and silences are for a critic to make speak. The author cannot speak everything because of ideology.

Building on Althusser's framework, Pierre Macherey dwells on how a literary text negotiates ideology. It is Althusser's notion that great literature is not merely a product of ideology because it creates distance with the reader. A literary text through its fictional content and form distances itself from ideology. But it also exposes the contradictions of that ideology through textual absences and silences. (To know more about the gaps you may go through Wolfgang Iser's essay "The Phenomenology of Reading"). A text has certain hidden elements that have meaning beyond the author's intentions. The text has gaps, inconsistencies and ambiguities, suggesting what the text suppresses, but they speak which may contradict the author's ideology or move beyond his ideological framework. An author, for instance, may leave out certain aspects of social realities which clashes with his worldview. The critics go beyond what is explicitly given in a text to look for the unspoken meanings. Therefore, Macherey calls for a Marxist criticism that

reveals “the text’s unconscious content—that is, its repressed awareness of the flaws, stress, and incoherence in the very ideology that it incorporates” (Abrams 208).

Check Your Progress:

How does Marxism envisage literature’s relation to ideology? (100 words)

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7.5 Representation of Reality:

Marxist literary theory has long grappled with the problem of representation—how literature depicts or reflects social reality under the conditions of a class-divided society. Since the early twentieth century, Marxist critics have debated what kind of literary form most effectively captures the “truth” of social relations. At the heart of these debates lies the question of whether realist narrative or avant-garde modernist experimentation is better suited to reveal the underlying dynamics of class, ideology, and history. Two key figures in this discourse—Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht—took sharply contrasting positions on this issue, thereby shaping one of the most enduring debates in Marxist aesthetics.

Georg Lukács (1885–1971), the Hungarian Marxist critic, was one of the most influential proponents of literary realism. For Lukács, the highest task of literature was not to mimic the surface appearances of life but to disclose its underlying social truths. Drawing on Marx’s concept of totality and Engels’s dictum that realism entails portraying “typical characters in typical

circumstances,” Lukács argued that realism provides a concrete and dialectical representation of the contradictions within society. By “typical,” he did not mean average or superficial, but characters and situations that express the essential class conflicts of their historical moment in a concrete and vivid way. The greatness of realist fiction, in his view, lies in its capacity to represent individual fates that illuminate broader historical forces—what he called the fusion of the particular and the universal.

Lukács admired the works of Balzac, Tolstoy, and Thomas Mann, who, he believed, sought to grasp social reality in its full complexity by situating individual lives within the evolving structures of class society. For Lukács, realism was not a neutral mirror of reality, but a cognitive mode—an artistic form capable of revealing the dialectical interrelation of social forces. Realist literature “pushes apart” the immediacy and chaos of everyday life to show the historically shaped patterns beneath it. In doing so, it helps readers understand the nature of alienation—a central concern in Marxist theory, which sees capitalism as estranging individuals from their labor, community, and self. Lukács contended that by uncovering the social origins of alienation, realist literature could point toward the possibility of overcoming it and achieving a more integrated, human society.

In contrast, Lukács vehemently criticized modernist literature, especially the works of Joyce, Kafka, and Beckett, for their formal fragmentation, psychological subjectivism, and historical abstraction. In key essays such as “*Realism in the Balance*” (1938) and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1957), Lukács argued that modernism promoted a pessimistic and a historical worldview. By focusing on isolated consciousness and fragmented experience, modernist literature presents alienation as a universal, eternal human

condition, detached from its historical and material roots. For Lukács, this amounted to naturalizing alienation and thereby obscuring or justifying the capitalist structures that produce it. From a Marxist perspective grounded in historical materialism, such a stance was ideologically regressive.

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), a Marxist playwright and poet, fundamentally challenged Lukács's view of realism, though he shared the commitment to representing social truth. Brecht accepted the Marxist imperative of producing politically and socially incisive art, but he rejected the idea that this required adherence to the formal conventions of nineteenth-century realism. Instead, Brecht redefined realism as a method of critical revelation—not bound to any particular style but to a political function. In his words, realism must be “wide and political, sovereign over all conventions.” For Brecht, any artistic technique—modernist, experimental, or non-traditional—could be realist if it illuminated the workings of society and encouraged political awareness.

To that end, Brecht developed Epic Theatre, a radically different mode of theatrical representation that challenged the conventions of emotional identification typical of traditional realism. Epic Theatre sought to expose the constructedness of dramatic illusion and to disrupt the passive consumption of narrative. Its goal was not to transport the spectator into a fictional world but to alienate them from the action—to provoke critical reflection rather than emotional empathy. Techniques such as *Verfremdungseffekt* (or *alienation effect*), *gestus*, historical distancing, and the use of songs, placards, and direct address all served to prevent immersion and instead foreground the social and ideological content of the performance.

In Brecht's vision, the theatre becomes a forum for inquiry, where audiences adopt a rational and detached perspective on what they see. By interrupting illusion and laying bare the mechanisms of power and ideology, Epic Theatre seeks to activate the spectator's capacity for social intervention. The function of representation here is not to reflect society as it appears, but to reveal its inner contradictions and possibilities for change. Whereas Lukács's realism aimed to present a coherent social totality through narrative continuity, Brecht's realism—dialectical in nature—focused on showing that society is made, and therefore can be remade.

In sum, the disagreement between Lukács and Brecht was not about whether art should represent reality, but how it should do so, and to what political end. While Lukács emphasized psychological depth, narrative coherence, and typicality to capture social totality, Brecht emphasized rupture, estrangement, and experimentation to expose the processes of historical becoming. Both aimed at truthful representation, but for Brecht, truth lies in disruption, not continuity; in cognitive awakening, not emotional catharsis. His model of representation insists that reality, under capitalism, is not something to be mimetically reproduced—but interrogated, challenged, and ultimately transformed.

SAQ:

Write about the debate between Lukacs and Brecht regarding representation of reality. (100 words)

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7.6 Marxist Literary Criticism: Key Points

Given below are certain key points of Marxist Criticism, some of which have already been elaborated. Please have a look and consider how it can enrich your understanding and study of literary text.

- Literature does not exist in an autonomous sphere. It is part of a much wider reality and has to be understood in specific contexts of history, society, culture, economy and ideology. There can be various explications of this link between literature and its contexts, but the idea of literature as a sovereign realm is dated now.
- Society is a sumtotal of relations and practices, of material and mental productions. But it thrives on the basis of material productions that give rise to a definite kind of ideological production. The ruling ideology of a society is the ideology of its ruling class. The sense of reality and truth in a historical society is constituted through ideology.
- Engels expounds the notion of typicality as a mode of representation of reality. Later Georg Lukacs carries it further in his famous theory of realism. Art should depict what is typical about a class as a “peculiar intersection of ideological circumstance” (Habib 53).
- The implications of all this for literature are many. Literature is generally viewed as a representation of reality or depiction of truth about life and the world. But reality is not easily accessible to people. One’s sense of reality is determined by an ideology which one is not aware of. As I said, the ruling ideology of an era is the result of the economic structure and expression of class-interest of a dominant class. Therefore, a Marxist critic undertakes to study literature not in terms of

some timeless artistic criteria but as a product of economic and ideological determinants.

- There are, however, differences within Marxist discourse about the status of literature. While dogmatic Marxists define literature strictly as a product of ruling ideology, a more flexible version of Marxism confers it a certain degree of autonomy claiming that it has formal mechanisms to negotiate ideology with. Georg Lukacs, the Hungarian Marxist critic, holds such a flexible view in his explication of the theory of realism. Drawing on Engels's concept of typicality. He argues that realist novels depict a concrete and total human personality in a way distinct from everyday reality, often in opposition to the authors own ideological predilections. All the contradictions of a historical period, in the utmost level of their development, figure in the social reality depicted by realist novelist.
- Walter Benjamin, another notable critic, observes the effect of changing material condition on the work of art, saying that the advent of modern technologies destroyed the aura of a work of art, making it mechanically reproducible. The elitist aura of the great art gave them autonomy and authority as product of high culture. Technologies of photography subvert this, opening up radical possibilities of work of art.
- Further, structuralism had impact on Marxist criticism, as exemplified by Althusser. We will discuss Althusser in some detail later. It is well to say now that the ideological apparatuses he discusses in the context of reproduction of the conditions of production have relative autonomy, departing again from the base-superstructural model of society given by Marx.

7.7 Summing Up

Marx never laid down specific principles of literary criticism or offered a detailed typology of literary genres. However, the conception of literature as part of the superstructure—alongside philosophy, law, morality, and culture—is quintessentially Marxian. Literary criticism, from this perspective, cannot be a benign or neutral exercise. Yet, departures from the classical Marxist schema of base and superstructure have been central to the development of Marxist literary theory.

Raymond Williams, for instance, argues that culture (and literature) is materially produced, thus foregrounding the conditions of production as a critical area of study. Literature, in turn, is not merely a reflection of the social totality but can exert influence upon it. Althusser significantly redefined ideology not as mere false consciousness but as something that exists materially within social apparatuses and is enacted through concrete practices.

Lucien Goldmann introduced the idea that the structure of a literary text reflects the structure of thought of the social class to which the author belongs. The greater the articulation of this vision in a text, the higher its artistic merit. Pierre Macherey, as interpreted by Terry Eagleton, emphasizes the importance of a text's silences—"what it does not say"—as sites where ideology operates most powerfully. These gaps are precisely what the critic must analyze to uncover the ideological negotiations within a literary work.

This brings us to a major aesthetic debate within Marxist literary theory: whether realist narrative or avant-garde experimentation is better suited to revealing the underlying dynamics of class, ideology, and history. Georg Lukács upheld realism for its narrative coherence, psychological depth, and "typicality," which he saw as

key to representing social totality. In contrast, Bertolt Brecht championed formal rupture, estrangement (Verfremdungseffekt), and experimental modes as strategies to expose historical processes and prompt critical awareness.

In sum, Marxist literary criticism explores literature's position within society, its entanglement with ideology, and its potential both to reflect and to reshape social reality. It interrogates the realist notion of typicality, examines the ideological function of narrative form, and engages with debates that stretch across structuralist and post-structuralist paradigms. At its core lies a commitment to understanding literature as a socially embedded and materially conditioned form of cultural production.

7.8 References and Suggested Reading

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Block- II

Unit 1: Roland Barthes: An Introduction

Unit 2: Roland Barthes: From Work to Text

Unit 3: Jacques Lacan: An Introduction

Unit 4: Jacques Lacan: Seminar on the Purloined Letter

Unit 5: Jacques Derrida: An Introduction

Unit 6: Jacques Derrida: Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences

Unit 7: Hayden White: The Historical Text as Literary Artifact

Unit 8: Luce Irigaray: An Introduction

Unit 9: Luce Irigaray: Sexual Difference

Unit 10: Homi K. Bhabha: An Introduction

Unit 11: Homi K. Bhabha: Dissemination

Unit 12: Edward Said: An Introduction

Unit 13: Edward Said: Travelling Theory

UNIT- 1

ROLAND BARTHES: AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch
- 1.4 Roland Barthes: Work and Ideas
- 1.5 Roland Barthes and the Concept of Authorship
- 1.6 Summing Up
- 1.7 References and Suggested Reading

1.1 Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to

- *learn* about the life of Roland Barthes;
- *identify* the major works of Roland Barthes;
- *gain* some familiarity with the key ideas of Roland Barthes;
- *evaluate* the idea of writing and authorship, as propounded by Barthes.

1.2 Introduction

In this paper, you are expected to go through Roland Barthes' essay "From Work to Text". Before delving into the text, some familiarity with the author is quite in order. Let me start with the statement that

to understand modern literary theory one must understand Roland Barthes.

For a long time, the idea of literature and the practice of the study of literature were shaped by the notion of the literary work as a stable, unified entity created by an individual with the investment of all his intentionality and motivation. Barthes brought about a rupture in this line of thinking and practice. Secondly, the varied products of modern popular culture—fashion, cuisine, advertisement—lay outside the domain of nuanced analysis because they were deemed too self-evident to warrant close analysis. It was Roland Barthes who opened up a vast arena of culture for critical study and analysis so that the hierarchical distinctions between literary and non-literary artifacts became blurred. Barthes was a theorist who believed that working from a position of power would blunt the radical potential of a theorist's thought, and hence he was keen to change his style of writing throughout his career and preferred a rather marginal position. Challenging revered ideas and interrogating orthodoxies was all he cared for, and he was cautious of the risk of one's critical discourse being assimilated into bourgeois culture. In this sense, Barthes was not a 'popular' theorist but one who was thoroughly committed to questioning received ideas.

If you want to discover Barthes through his writing, it might not be possible to go through all his work within a short period of time, but I can recommend a few of his critical essays—"The Death of the Author," "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," "Rhetoric of the Image," "The Pleasure of the Text," and "From Work to Text." Still, the question of the relevance of a theorist or a theory needs to be posed time and again, for there is no final answer. Why, then, is Barthes important for a student of literature? Let me respond to this question in the following way: as a student of

literature, it is our primary vocation to discover meanings and formulate interpretations of a given literary work—be it Shakespeare, Keats, or Chinua Achebe. New Criticism offers a response here, arguing that a literary text has a determinate set of meanings, and its human content needs to be grasped through close reading of the text. It was Roland Barthes who countered this with the assertion that meaning is a work of language, which is arbitrary, and the author is not its custodian. It was thanks to Barthes’s critical intervention that the text is now opened up for the exploration of multiple meanings and for multiple interpretations.

In this unit, we will explore Barthes’s writing career, examine his shift from structuralism to post-structuralism, and introduce some of his key ideas and themes. But before that, let us take a brief look at his life.

Stop to Consider:

From the essays that I mentioned (which is not at all an exclusive reading list), I suggest you to start with “The Death of the Author” and “The Pleasure of the Text” because with these, you will be able to find connections to “From Work to Text”. Try and formulate the basic ideas of these two essays.

1.3 A Brief Biographical Sketch

Roland Barthes was born in 1915 in the town of Cherbourg in Normandy. His father, a naval officer, was killed when he was one year old. His mother and paternal grandmother raised him in Bayonne, where he learned piano from his aunt. When he was nine years old, the family moved to Paris. He was a brilliant student, but his persistent health issues greatly affected his academic career. From 1934 to 1947, he was impeded in his studies by several periods of isolation in sanatoria due to tuberculosis. He could not

complete the agrégation examination, which was a prerequisite for securing teaching posts in universities. Brilliant as he was as a student, his ill health was a great impediment to his intellectual pursuits. Nevertheless, he took up short-term teaching posts from the late 1940s to the early 1960s in Romania, Egypt, and various institutions in Paris. In 1962, he became the Director of Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In 1976, he was appointed to the Chair of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France, one of France's most esteemed academic institutions. He held this position until his death. It was not a degree-awarding institution but a place of pure research. Barthes consciously avoided association with degree-awarding universities because of their position of power. Throughout his life, he deliberately stood on the margins of power, maintaining a constantly evolving voice. Once a set of ideas became stabilized and incorporated by institutions, he moved on to a new area. The questioning of received ideas and resistance to institutional and discursive power were hallmarks of his intellectual identity.

Barthes' life was tragically cut short on March 26, 1980, when he succumbed to injuries sustained after being struck by a laundry van in Paris. His death marked the loss of a major intellectual force, but his influence endures through his extensive writings on language, literature, and culture.

1.4 The Works of Roland Barthes

Given below are the major works of Barthes:

- *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Writing Degree Zero) (1953) English translation by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (2001), with an important preface by Susan Sontag.

- *Michelet par lui-même* (Michelet) (1954)
- *Mythologies* (1957): A collection of essays written between 1954 and 1957, originally published in *Les Lettres Nouvelles*. English translations by Annette Lavers and Richard Howard.
- *Sur Racine* (On Racine) (1963)
- *Essais critiques* (Critical Essays) (1964): A major collection of essays supplementing his ideas on literature, writing, commitment, myth, the *Nouveau Roman*, semiology, and more.
- *Critique et vérité* (Criticism and Truth) (1966) A response to Raymond Picard's *New Criticism or New Fraud?*
- *Système de la mode* (The Fashion System) (1967) Written primarily between 1957 and 1963, this work analyzes the structuralist semiotics of fashion.
- *L'Empire des signes* (Empire of Signs) (1970)
- *S/Z* (1970) A landmark literary analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, offering over 200 pages of commentary and exemplifying the possibilities of textual interpretation.
- *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971): A study of three figures—Marquis de Sade, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and Charles Fourier—exploring the intersection of pornography, spirituality, and political writing.
- *Le Plaisir du texte* (The Pleasure of the Text) (1973)
- *Roland Barthes* (1975): A text difficult to classify, blending autobiography, self-critique, and fictional elements.
- *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (A Lover's Discourse: Fragments) (1977)
- *Image-Music-Text* (1977)
- *Nouveaux essais critiques* (New Critical Essays) (1980)

- *La Chambreclaire: Note sur la photographie* (Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography) (1980): This is Barthes's final book, published during his lifetime, offering a deeply personal meditation on photography and loss.

1.5 The Ideas of Roland Barthes

Barthes's first major work is *Writing Degree Zero* (1953). It is both a theoretical analysis of the relationship between language style and *écriture* (writing), and a history of French literature that differs from the one provided by Jean-Paul Sartre. In *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Roland Barthes offers a significant departure from Jean-Paul Sartre's view of literary commitment. While Sartre emphasizes the author's responsibility to both their own and the reader's freedom within a context of modern alienation, Barthes argues that the writer's agency is more constrained. Authors, he contends, operate within pre-existing structures of language, literary forms, conventions, genres, and codes. Language itself precedes the author, and while style reflects the writer's personal history, it is not a matter of free choice. Instead, Barthes focuses on *écriture*—writing—as the space where the author's choice resides, specifically the choice of form.

Sartre connects commitment to message and communication, but Barthes highlights a characteristic anti-communicative tendency in modern writing. While acknowledging that authors inevitably respond to their socio-political context, Barthes locates commitment not in the message but in the form itself. However, even these forms are pre-existing, forcing the writer to navigate the tension between freedom and established conventions. Radical writing only impacts readers against the backdrop of existing forms, and even radical forms risk becoming clichés if repeated. *Writing Degree Zero*

further explores the evolution of writing styles and their ideological functions, demonstrating how literary movements like classicism, romanticism, and realism reflect changing social and political landscapes.

Stop to Consider:

Barthes highlights two points in *Writing Degree Zero* which you need to consider: His notion of 'commitment' and the danger of writing's potential assimilation into Literature. Sartre talks about the commitment of writer in terms of communication of a 'message'. In contrast, Barthes contends that literary form itself communicate ideological commitment. Secondly, bourgeois culture can assimilate all radical forms, and hence the contemporary writer must strive for an authentic form of writing, aware of the fact that it, too, might be assimilated into the dominant form of bourgeois writing, called Literature.

In *Michelet*, Barthes examines the work of the 19th-century French historian Jean Michelet, whose historical perspectives he doesn't necessarily endorse. While acknowledging Michelet's petite-bourgeois background and his distance from modern historiography, Barthes focuses on Michelet as a writer, exploring the literary qualities of his work, particularly his idiosyncratic thematic organization of historical events. Even if Michelet's historical interpretations lack originality, Barthes argues that his writing possesses literary merit, thus contributing to modern historical discourse. This approach anticipates later structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of history as an objective body of knowledge, culminating in new historicism (and finds a parallel in Hayden White's argument, in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," about the narrative and literary dimensions of historical writing).

Barthes also emphasizes the strangeness of Michelet's work, a similar distancing strategy he employs in *On Racine*. In his three essays on the French dramatist, Barthes challenges the notion of Racine's universal significance. This distancing technique, evident in both the Michelet and Racine studies, resembles the theatrical distancing effect advocated and practiced by Bertolt Brecht.

Stop to Consider:

Faced with the threat of bourgeois culture absorbing and neutralizing radical writing, Barthes proposes a strategy of distancing the reader from the text. This approach challenges the assumed “universal” and “natural” meanings embedded within the text, revealing them as problematic constructs.

Mythologies (1957) is one of the most influential works in 1950s. It examines how culture naturalizes ideological constructs, making them appear real, universal, and unquestionable. Through a series of essays, Barthes analyzes everyday cultural phenomena in post-war France, such as advertising, wrestling, travel guides, and culinary habits, revealing how these elements function as myths that reinforce bourgeois values. Culture, he argues, is not neutral but a powerful ideological tool that conceals the economic and social structures underlying its representations. By using semiotics—the study of signs—Barthes demonstrates how meaning is shaped not only by what is explicitly stated but also by the hidden connotations embedded within cultural artifacts.

One of Barthes's striking examples is his analysis of advertising, particularly soap powders and detergents, which are marketed using the language of militaristic patriotism, portraying the product as a

force that “wages war” on dirt. This disguises the industrial and economic realities behind the commodity, reducing it to a myth of cleanliness and liberation. Similarly, he deconstructs the symbolic role of wine in French culture, showing how it is mythologized as both sustenance for workers and a marker of aristocratic virility, reinforcing national identity while concealing the exploitative labor used in its production, especially in French colonies like Algeria. He also dissects the spectacle of professional wrestling, arguing that it functions as a morality play where justice is theatrically enacted rather than contested, reflecting cultural narratives of power, punishment, and redemption.

Through such analyses, *Mythologies* exposes how mass culture perpetuates dominant ideologies by transforming historical and socially constructed meanings into seemingly natural truths. Barthes’s critique extends to travel guides, which impose a Eurocentric gaze on foreign lands, reducing them to exoticized, consumable experiences that reinforce colonial perspectives. His work remains foundational in media studies, cultural criticism, and poststructuralist thought, offering a powerful method for decoding how everyday objects and practices serve to uphold ideological structures

Stop to consider:

Critique of bourgeois culture has been Barthes’s life-long work. *Mythologies* is important because here we see Barthes launching a full-scale critique of modern ‘mythology’. Myth is often seen as synonymous with fiction or falsity. Here Barthes defines myth as an ideological process whereby cultural practices and objects which are historically produced are assigned universal values, masking the reality.

Barthes distinguishes between two schools of criticism: one that employs models derived from structuralism, psychoanalysis, and other theoretical developments, focusing primarily on language; and what he calls "old criticism," which derives meaning from the author or other extrinsic contexts while claiming to be ideologically neutral. The latter, represented by Raymond Picard, upholds traditional values and the supposed greatness of literature. Barthes argues that the old criticism's pretense of ideological disinterestedness merely conceals its bourgeois ideology. Barthes's "new criticism" (not to be conflated with the Anglo-American *New Criticism* represented by figures such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and W.K. Wimsatt) is explicitly aware of its ideological position and actively opposes the ideals of verisimilitude, tradition, and common sense. In *Criticism and Truth*, Barthes explains that criticism is fundamentally concerned with language.

The scientific approach to literature aims to understand the fundamental conditions of its meanings rather than merely highlighting its content. Barthes's *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives* is a key contribution to this line of analysis. Given the vast number of narratives, the challenge lies in how to analyze them systematically. Just as Ferdinand de Saussure analyzed languages in terms of their fundamental linguistic structures—engaging the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes—Barthes applies a Saussurean model of structural linguistics to narratives. Following Saussure, Barthes distinguishes three levels of narrative sequences: the basic level of function, the higher level of action, and the highest level of narrative itself. All elements in a narrative belong to the fundamental functional level, which are then organized into the level of action. Functions can be *distributive*, involving causal relations between actions, or *indices*, referring to details that

accumulate to produce a specific meaning—for instance, various traits of a character collectively define the character. By analyzing these levels of narrative sequences, Barthes demonstrates that the structuralist approach to literature is perennially concerned with the conditions underlying the production of meaning.

This is how Barthes demystifies bourgeois literature, demonstrating that reality is not innocently reflected in a literary text. Instead, reality is an illusion constructed through various narrative functions and indices of character and atmosphere. Here, Barthes is also deeply influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological structuralism. Just as Lévi-Strauss shifts away from analyzing the content of rituals and myths, focusing instead on their underlying structural principles, Barthes examines how literature—like culture and human practices—is fundamentally mediated through a system of signification.

Stop to Consider:

This marks the structuralist phase of Roland Barthes, where he applies Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics to the study of narratives. His anti-bourgeois stance is evident here as well, as he challenges the notion that the meaning of literature is universal or widely agreed upon. Instead, he argues that such meanings often serve as expressions of bourgeois ideology. Through structural analysis, Barthes demystifies meaning, revealing that an intricate ideological process is always at work in the production of meaning within a narrative text.

Amid the vortex of the student movement in Paris in 1968—though the movement ultimately failed—it unleashed a wave of radical ideas that profoundly shaped French intellectual culture. Thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard, and Philippe Sollers emerged during this period, marking the heyday of structuralism while simultaneously fostering the growth of post-structuralist thought from within structuralism itself. Derrida, in his seminal paper *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*, offers a powerful critique of structuralist thought, challenging the very concept of structure. He argues that a structure presupposes a center that organizes the text while remaining outside the play of language, thereby locating meaning elsewhere. In this way, the center is paradoxically both inside and outside the structure. According to Derrida, the entire history of Western philosophy consists of replacing one center with another. However, if the center is itself a sign with shifting meanings, then it is not fixed.

Structuralism is founded on the concept of the sign, but as Derrida demonstrates, the sign itself is unstable. Since the center is a sign that changes, the entire structure becomes fluid. As a result, we cannot identify any "transcendental signified" in a text. This absence of a transcendental signified infinitely extends the process of signification, where the signified becomes a signifier in an endless chain of deferrals—leading to an infinite regress of signifiers without ever arriving at a final, fixed meaning.

Barthes' post-structuralist phase begins with *Empire of Signs*, a work based on his reflections on Japan and his experience of visiting the country. Japan fascinates Barthes because he perceives it as a place free from the Western obsession with fixed meaning. Beyond the fact that Tokyo's streets have no names, Barthes identifies

various aspects of Japanese culture where stable, definitive meanings are resisted. As someone unfamiliar with the Japanese language, he experiences his surroundings as a field of free-floating signs without intrinsic meaning. He does not view Japan as merely a geographical territory or a cultural site subject to positivist description but rather as a text where meaning remains unfixed. As Barthes puts it, “Japan, as a text whose signs are not ‘anchored’ in a ‘supreme signified’ (a center or transcendental signified), provokes Barthes into a form of writing” (Allen, *Roland Barthes*, 73).

Check Your Progress:

Write short notes on the following: (in 80 words each)

- (i) Roland Barthes’s debt to Saussurean linguistics

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- (ii) Barthes’s structuralist phase

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- (iii) Barthes’s demystification of cultural myths

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- (iv) Roland Barthes's resistance to bourgeois culture and ideology

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1.6 Barthes and the Concept of Authorship

Although New Criticism calls for a unitary focus on the text beyond the scope of authorial intention, it does not entirely refute the idea of the author. The author is still the one whose intention is realized—if not directly reflected—in the text. Therefore, textual mechanisms and the operations of language remain central to New Criticism. However, Structuralism posits that the concrete totality of a text results from an underlying abstract structure rather than from authorial consciousness. The organization of narrative action and textual indices reveal the existence of forces beyond the author. Structuralism resists the humanistic assumptions of New Criticism, asserting that structure itself is the telos of literary pursuit.

Subjectivity, according to Structuralism, is made possible within language. Language allows the speaker to refer to themselves as the subject, but this subject is no longer a manifestation of personal consciousness; rather, it functions as a geometrical category within a system of signs. Roland Barthes distinguishes between different kinds of texts: those that appear as concrete expressions of reality, in which the reader passively receives meaning, and *writerly* texts, which require the reader's active participation in the construction of meaning. Building upon this understanding of modernist texts, Barthes later posits writing as a space where multiple discourses

from various cultures intersect and collide. In this space, the writing subject effaces itself, giving rise to the reader, who explores the text’s multiple meanings.

Criticism’s task now is not to decipher signs of the author’s existence, nor to uncover a determinate set of meanings from a limited network of textual elements, but to engage with the totality of writing itself. While Barthes decisively decenters the author, he simultaneously heralds the emergence of the reader within the scene of writing. Writing posits the reader, yet the reader is not an individual subject but a space in which meaning unfolds.

<p style="text-align: center;">SAQ:</p> <p>Write about the central argument of Barthes in his “The Death of the Author” (60 words).</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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1.7 Summing Up

Roland Barthes was a seminal mind of the twentieth century, a key figure in literary theory and a thinker whose ideas extend beyond the mere literary—into the domains of sociology, semiotics, media studies, film studies, and so on. Barthes was a relentless fighter against intellectual hegemony, even against the possibility of his own notions being reified into closed orthodoxy. With Barthes, we enter the arena of literary study where the idea of the text is radically different from the earlier notion of the literary work. The idea of intertextuality, now a commonplace in literary discourse, is,

in fact, Barthes's formulation. Secondly, culture as a benign force sustaining people's lives is contested by Barthes, who meticulously developed a critique of modern consumerist culture and its close negotiations with dominant bourgeois ideology. Barthes's foremost contribution to literary study would be the way he extends the domain of the text, making it a site for the reader's manifold engagement, producing multiple meanings. In this unit, after a brief discussion of Barthes's life, we have explored some of his key ideas and examined the notion of authorship as articulated in his arguably most popular essay, *The Death of the Author*. We can now move on to the essay *From Work to Text* in the next unit.

1.8 References and Suggested Reading

Allen, Graham. *Roland Barthes*. Routledge, 2003.

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UNIT- 2

ROLAND BARTHES: FROM WORK TO TEXT

Unit Structure:

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Reading the Essay

2.3.1 Section I

2.3.2 Section II

2.3.3 Section II

2.3.4 Section IV

2.3.5 Section V

2.3.6 Section VI

2.3.7 Section VII

2.4 Summing Up

2.5 References and Suggested Reading

2.1 Objectives:

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *attain* a perspective on the essay;
- *find* out the main arguments of the essay;
- *write* about the distinctions Barthes makes between work and Text.

2.2 Introduction:

In the post-structuralist critical climate, the idea of *literature* becomes a deeply problematic and unstable category. This is largely

because it depends on a tacitly maintained boundary between ‘literature’ and ‘non-literature’—a boundary that increasingly comes under question in the wake of structuralist and post-structuralist thought. The question of what constitutes literature—its *literariness*—had once been central to the Formalist tradition, where intrinsic properties such as foregrounded language, defamiliarization, and aesthetic function distinguished literary from non-literary discourse.

However, with the rise of structuralism, and particularly its insistence that meaning is generated through the structures of language itself, all cultural forms began to be viewed as systems of signs governed by linguistic codes. In this expanded semiotic framework, the traditional notion of literature is displaced by a broader category: the *text*. It is in this shifting intellectual context that Roland Barthes's work becomes critically significant.

Barthes's contribution lies in his radical reconceptualization of the text—not merely as a written object but as a site of production, plurality, and play. In his influential essay *From Work to Text*, Barthes outlines a shift in literary theory from treating literature as a stable, authored *work*—tied to intention, ownership, and institutional boundaries—to embracing the more fluid and open-ended category of the *text*. This move destabilizes not only the authority of the author but also the presumed coherence of the literary object itself.

Closely tied to this is Barthes's reconfiguration of the role of the reader. In contrast to earlier models in which the reader was a passive recipient of the author's intended meaning, Barthes insists that the reader is an active participant in the creation of meaning. The *text* exists not as a closed artifact to be deciphered, but as an

open field of signifiers that is activated in the act of reading. In this sense, the text is a process rather than a product—it resists fixity, classification, and authorial control.

This unit will examine Barthes's key arguments in *From Work to Text*. It will also explore how his conceptual shift from 'work' to 'text' alters our understanding of literature, authorship, reading, and interpretation. As we shall see, Barthes's theorization opens up the possibility of reading not just literary works, but all cultural productions, as *texts*—plural, unstable, and in continuous negotiation with their readers and contexts.

2.3 Reading the Essay:

Roland Barthes's assertion that the transformation from the traditional idea of a literary work to the notion of a text does not take place in a vacuum. It is informed by intellectual developments in major fields such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and linguistics. You may ask: what role do these disciplines play in this conceptual shift from work to text? We will have occasion to return to this question, but let me now tell you that these intellectual developments have challenged traditional notions of the self, our understanding of the forces that constitute it, as well as ideas of authority and structure. Marxism, for instance, reveals that no cultural phenomenon (or text, for that matter) springs solely from the inner ideas of an agent or author; rather, such phenomena are produced through an ideological process of which the individual is not the free custodian. Positing the text as a theoretical object, Barthes contends that insights from these various disciplines help us conceptualize the nature of the text. However, a text is not directly owned by any single discipline. For instance, to define a text

exclusively as a cultural system is to undermine its ideological dimension or the process of signification inherent in its language.

How developments in other disciplines effected the shift from Work to Text?

Marxist theory expounds the role of ideology in shaping cultural production as well as literary text. The author in this framework is not the originator of meaning and significance, because the individual is embedded within broader material and ideological structures. Literature (or any cultural work) is not simply the product of personal intention but a result of historical and socio-economic forces. This challenges the notion of the “work” as a self-contained, authorial creation and opens the way for understanding the “text” as a site where ideology operates, where meaning is not fixed but contested and produced through reading. The notion of the literary work is grounded upon the notion of the author who creates that work. In psychoanalysis, however, the author or the individual is not a coherent self but a subject divided and driven by unconscious desires and structured by language. Both Writing and reading are not the product of conscious mind alone but is largely shaped by unconscious processes, slips, displacements and repressions. On the other hand, Structural linguistics, especially the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, redefined language as a system of signs where meaning arises not from any intrinsic connection between words and things but from the differential relations among signs. This radically destabilizes the idea of fixed meaning. Barthes takes this linguistic insight to argue that the “text” is a network of signifiers without a final signified—it is open-ended, iterable, and plural.

Barthes highlights the *mutation* involved in the shift from *work* to *text*, claiming that it forms part of a broader epistemological

transformation. This shift is analogous to what Einstein introduced in Newtonian mechanics. In other words, the influence of these disciplines allows us to relativize the relations between author (or scriptor), reader, and critic. The long-standing notion of the *work* is grounded in the self-assured and self-justifying authority of these three positions. However, these roles are no longer seen as absolute, and hence a new object becomes necessary. “That object is the text” (“From Work to Text” 156). Barthes, at this point, presents a few *propositions*, noting explicitly that they are not intended as solid arguments. Why does he avoid constructing definitive arguments in relation to the *text*? Because he is acutely aware that any such conclusive articulation might reify and essentialize the very object he seeks to redefine. That would run contrary to Barthes’s emancipatory critical project. He is at pains to distance himself from a positivistic and essentialist language, as it would undermine the ethos of the *text* itself.

Let us now elaborate these propositions and see how they can enrich our understanding of the text and of its distinction with the work.

2.3.1 Section I

Barthes warns against simplistic associations—such as identifying the *text* with modernist or avant-garde works, and the *work* with classical literature. Categories like tradition and modernity, when understood through a merely chronological lens, do not help us grasp the idea of the *text*. Rather, Barthes subverts such temporal hierarchies: “there may be ‘text’ in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts.” (156). This indicates that crucial distinctions exist between *text* and *work*, but they are not identifiable through chronology.

How, then, does he distinguish between them? A *work* is an externally identifiable object, while a *text* is a matter of active demonstration and experience. The materiality of the *work* is contrasted with the linguistic condition of the *text*. As Barthes puts it, “the work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language” (157). A *text* is a *methodological field*—a concept that implicates the reader and foregrounds the process of reading itself. It prompts a shift in focus from the *objective content* of a literary work—whose boundaries are stable and fixed—to the mode of interpretation and engagement that reading demands. This distinction is intimately tied to the notion of experience that Barthes emphasizes: the *text* is “*the Text is experienced only in an activity of production.*” (157). The ongoing, participatory nature of this experience differentiates the *text* from an *object*, which is passively consumed. In contrast to the consumption-oriented logic of capitalist culture, the *text* emerges as a site of *production*—where meaning is not delivered but generated through the act of reading. At this point, one is reminded of Wolfgang Iser’s essay “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” which articulates similar ideas. Iser writes, “a text takes on life when it is realized” (*Modern Criticism and Theory* 189). That is, a text is an experiential entity whose mode of being requires the active involvement of the reader. It is the reader who animates the text, setting it in motion. Iser further explains that the text becomes a space where both reader and author engage in a play of imagination. The sentences of a literary text are not mere statements of existing things; they also point to what is yet to come, producing expectations. These expectations are seldom fulfilled, leading to their modification—a process that, as Iser notes, “will also have a retrospective effect on what has already been read” (192). Anticipation and retrospection, mediated by memory, render the text dynamic throughout the act of reading.

2.3.2 Section II

For now, however, it is the *experiential character* of the text that deserves close attention.

The *text* does not produce any hierarchy, nor is it the result of hierarchical categories such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ literature. It does not confine itself to a specific genre; rather, it subverts textual classifications and generic categorizations. The *text* resists being placed within fixed categories like ‘novel,’ ‘essay,’ ‘poem,’ or even ‘literature’ itself. In contrast, the *work* is institutionalized—it is classified and catalogued to find its place within libraries and academic systems.

The *text*, by contrast, represents a kind of *limit-experience*—one that brings us to the edge of what is normally thinkable or representable. It not only finds itself at the margins of genre but also strives to exceed the limits of established truths, ideologies, and dominant opinions. Barthes emphasizes this radical, disruptive, and transcendental potential of the *text*. One can certainly trace a continuity between Barthes’s political radicalism and his disruptive conception of the *text*, which challenges conventional literary boundaries and institutional norms.

2.3.3 Section III

Barthes conceptualizes the distinction between work and text in terms of the process of signification. A work is constructed with regard to the notion of a final meaning, a signified. In cases where this signified is apparent, the work invites philological study. In cases where the work’s meaning is secret and must be sought for, it depends upon interpretation. Barthes carries subtle suggestions when he says that the work belongs to the civilization of the sign,

implying that the notion of work, enshrined upon a final meaning, elicits a larger order of power and civilization. Pitted against the stable and solid civilization of signs is the idea of text being slippery and dilatory. A text is a field in which the signified is infinitely postponed. Instead, the signifier remains perpetually in motion; this condition of the textual signifier is not the result of a certain mode of reading but is related to the notion of play. Barthes calls this play “disconnections, overlappings, variations”(158). It implies that the signifier keeps moving, creating various conditions of meaning, generating a “symbolic energy” in the text. Here a question might arise: are not all verbal discourses suffused with this ‘symbolic energy,’ with the potential to suggest beyond the referential? Here Barthes answers—there is a limit to the symbolic potential in so far as a literary ‘work’ is concerned. The text, in contrast, is “radically symbolic.” This radical symbolism is the defining trait of a text. Further, “the text is restored to language.” Further, as Barthes adds, “like language, it is structured, but decentred.” Here you may hear an echo of Jacques Lacan’s pronouncement—the unconscious is structured like a language. What is the structure of language, then? Saussure talks about the syntagmatic and paradigmatic poles of linguistic discourse. Running through both the axes of selection and combination is a principle of difference. The play of difference never closes off. Jacques Derrida argues that a text has no transcendental signified, and hence the text is open-ended.

2.3.4 Section IV

Plurality of meaning is a condition of the text. Meanings do not co-exist here as a simultaneity. Meanings animate through a passage—a passage of a reader. Barthes’s metaphoric description stresses this multiplicity of meaning inhering in a text through such words as ‘explosion’ or ‘dissemination’. There is a lack of order in the way

meanings inhere in the text. Similarly, although the text invites a stroller to stroll along its pathways, it is not schematic ‘sight-seeing’. The association of the reader to a stroller, or to an ‘idle subject’, calls to mind the concept of the flâneur. Like a flâneur, the reader is a detached observer of the textual ‘spectacle’, but he is also a participant in the textual experience, in a way that is anonymous and reflective.

Stop to Consider

The Flâneur:

Barthes’s conceptualization of the reader as an ‘idle stroller’ can encourage us to see him as a flâneur. A flâneur is a concept that emerged in 19th-century French literature and culture, referring to a detached, leisurely urban wanderer—typically a man—who strolls through the city (especially Paris), observing its scenes, people, and architecture. The flâneur is both spectator and participant, someone who moves through the modern city while remaining anonymous and reflective, interpreting its rhythms and life without fully engaging.

Let us here concern ourselves with a fact. Have you ever thought over the question of theoretical language? How does Barthes, as a theorist of the text, meditate upon the dynamic, fluctuating, and polysemantic character of the text, and what kind of language does he choose to express his ideas here? The concept of a meta language—a language that describes its own mechanism—is not unproblematic. For one thing, when plurality of meaning is posited as a feature of a text (and mind that ‘a text is held in language’), can this fact be conveyed through the monolithic language of logic and rationality without invoking figures that involve ‘play’? This is why Barthes is reluctant to present his insights as solid argument.

Further, conscious as he is of the possibility of his own language being incorporated into the bourgeois institution of rationality, Barthes resorts to a more oblique, poetic, suggestive, and figurative language in his theoretical exposition. Look at the idea of the reader's exploration of the text's bewildering plurality conveyed through the metaphor of a lazy stroller's vision of an enormous landscape. Let me quote this wonderful and suggestive metaphor of a fulfilling topography experienced in a journey:

“this passably empty subject strolls - it is what happened to the author of these lines, then it was that he had a vivid idea of the Text – on the side of a valley, a *oued* flowing down below {*oued* is there to bear witness to a certain feeling of unfamiliarity); what he perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colours, vegetation, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of birds, children's voices from over on the other side, passages, gestures, clothes of inhabitants near or far away”(159).

Let us not mean, by this metaphor of a fulfilling journey, that reading is always a pleasurable experience in the ordinary sense of the term. Barthes here invokes a pleasure of a different kind—not at all the pleasure of simply exploring the beauties of nature. It is a pleasure of exploring various levels of meaning and significance, of being alive to the multiple dimensions of meaning of a text.

It is from the ‘known codes’ (the phonemes, letters, words) that these multiplicities issue, but these codes combine in unique ways. Barthes here contends that the experience of multiple meanings of a text is the result of difference, which is why a text does not repeat itself completely. Each reading is singular. These are radical theoretical insights. Up to New Criticism, literary study was focused on the organic unity of the literary text, its singular core of

determinate meanings. Even Formalism attempted to evolve a ‘science’ of literature. To Barthes, although a text has no such science or grammar, it has its network of relationships with other texts. But a text does not have a causal relationship with other texts. Intertextuality does not indicate an originary locus of a text’s meaning, because the other texts exist in fragments, as “citations, references, echoes”(160).

Literary writers often borrow from pre-existing sources—written or oral. Shakespeare borrowed from Plutarch, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, Chaucer, or other anonymous texts. Barthes would not deny that writers read and borrow from earlier works. But a text’s meaning does not originate from a single source. A text is not the product of a single origin but a weaving together of multiple texts, cultural signs, and codes. A text can echo, reflect, or rework other texts within a vast cultural field. Meaning is not derived from any originary work but created through difference and interaction in a network of textual relationships.

2.3.5 Section V

Another key distinction between *work* and *text* lies in their relationship to filiation. The material, empirical fact of a literary work being written by an *author* is not the central concern here. Rather, Barthes focuses on how this physical fact—of a work having an author—translates into a more critical issue: the *determination* of the work. The social recognition of a work as authored implies the assertion of authority over it. Note Barthes’s language: the work is “appropriated” to its author, suggesting that this appropriation limits the semantic and interpretive possibilities of the work. A work’s manuscript is revered, and the author’s intentions are treated with deference. Even New Criticism, which attempts to establish the sovereignty of the text, does not entirely reject the category of

intentionality; instead, it argues that intentions realized within the text are not extrinsic but intrinsic to it. Barthes, however, pushes further, arguing that the author is the *father* of the work—thus associating the work with patriarchal authority and power. In contrast, a *text* is read “without the inscription of the Father” (168).

The work, in conventional literary discourse, is consecrated as an *organism*—a living entity that grows organically through its filial link to the author. This view sustains the traditional idea of the literary work as unified and coherent.

Stop to Consider:

Organic Unity:

The Romantics, particularly Coleridge and Wordsworth see a literary work as an organic whole where each part contributes to the whole and which grows like a living organism. The organic unity is deeply tied to the idea of the author as the creative genius that shapes the work from within, ensuring harmony, coherence and integrity.

However, Barthes does not propose an *ontological* distinction between work and text in an exclusive manner. Rather, he foregrounds a *methodological* difference. Against the organic model of the *work*, Barthes offers the metaphor of the *network* to describe the *text*. This is a fitting analogy, as it captures both the text’s multiple intertextual connections and its capacity to animate multiple meanings through ever-shifting combinations.

Once severed from the chain of authorial filiation, the text becomes free to be read without reference to its author. That said, Barthes acknowledges that the author can *return* to the text. In novels, for

example, a character may represent the authorial point of view, and in such cases, the implied author may be identified with that character. Yet this character remains as fictional as any other, and their inscription no longer holds a privileged status. Barthes ultimately concludes his stance on the author with a definitive assertion: “The *I* that writes the text, it, too, is never more than a paper *I*” (161).

2.3.6 Section VI

The work is an object of consumption. In a consumerist framework, objects are distinguished by their intrinsic properties. The ideology of consumer culture resonates with this mode of relating to the work, although the notion of the work predates modern capitalism. Here, the supposedly intrinsic qualities are what distinguish one work from another. The text, however, releases the work from its destiny of being an object of consumption and liberates it as play, practice, or production. A text, then, becomes a metaphor for reading. Hence, the shift from work to text signifies a shift in the framework—from consumption to production.

Ordinarily, the production of a text is perceived to be the prerogative of the author, while the reader belongs to the domain of reception. Writing and reading are seen as two distinct activities—one related to production, the other to reception. The text collapses this distance between writing and reading. This does not mean the reader projects themselves into the text; rather, both writing and reading are unified by the same signifying practice.

To elaborate the notion of the text as a site of production rather than an object of consumption, Barthes introduces the concept of ‘play’.

Let us digress briefly. Johan Huizinga, a Dutch historian and cultural theorist, elaborates the idea of ‘play’ in his book *Homo Ludens*. He posits play as a fundamental property of culture and even a basis of civilization. Play, he argues, stands in contrast to notions of determination, control, need, and utilitarian principles. In language, for instance, abstract expressions are often metaphorical—constituting a play upon language itself. Play resides outside the binaries of truth and falsehood, wisdom and folly. It is a temporally and spatially bounded activity governed by its own rules, yet it entails the freedom of the player.

Positing play as a civilizing force, Huizinga critiques modern society for its rationalism, bureaucracy, and commercialization, which, he argues, stifle the playful spirit. This creative, voluntary, and rule-bound activity—infused with the free spirit of culture—is the essence of play, and it resonates with Barthes’s notion of the text as play, or with the idea of reading itself as play with the text. Reading, in this sense, is not restricted by ulterior motives or by an immanent interpretive framework, as often happens with the work. In a religious framework, for instance, one cannot read the scriptures playfully, creatively, or with freedom.

Barthes understands the text in a double sense: playing at the text and playing the text. The first implies a playful spirit of exploration—a kind of ludic encounter that elicits pleasure and freedom. The second carries musical connotations: the text is like a score to be performed by the reader, where meanings are not inherent properties of the text but are created through performance. Here, the reader becomes a co-author, and the text’s actualization emerges from collaboration.

2.3.7 Section VII

Reading is a pleasurable experience. But work and text afford pleasure of different kinds. A work elicits some distance from the reader, who realizes that he cannot *produce* its meanings but can receive them passively, something akin to consuming. In that sense, Barthes says that as far as work is concerned, the reader cannot 're-write' it. Therefore, the pleasure associated with a work is basically the pleasure of consumption. A text, in contrast, gives pleasure without separation. What does this gap or separation imply?

As for work, however deeply the reader identifies with the piece of literature, the pleasure he derives from it is a sort of pre-programmed one, and he is always external to the work. In case of the text, the reader (or the subject) is located inside the text. There is no privileged outside position that he can assume in relation to the text. Being inside the text, the subject can have intimate, immersive experience of the text. At the same time, because of the text's multiplicity, this pleasure is disruptive and intimate at the same time. A text cannot be consumed passively, nor can its meanings be exhausted. 'pleasure without separation also suggests the blurring of boundary between the text and the reader, or between reading and writing.

Check Your Progress:

- Critically comment on the distinction Barthes makes between the work and the text. (100 words)

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- Discuss how Barthes discusses the event of ‘reading’ in relation to the text. (100 words)

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- Explain after Barthes the notions of ‘play’ and ‘pleasure’. How does Barthes separate work and text in these terms? (150 words)

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2.4 Summing Up

Thus, we have learned not only Barthes’s conceptual exposition of the idea of the text and its difference from work. In the first place, although distinctions need to be made between the two categories of literary work, this distinction is not done chronologically. The shift from work to text that he dwells on is a shift in thought and critical sensibility: an intellectual breakthrough. We have discussed how developments in other disciplines caused this breakthrough to take place. In the first place, he defines them in terms of externality and process. A work is a physical external entity traceable to a library, while a text requires demonstration. A work is largely determined by authorial intention and hence is organically whole. A text, in contrast, is like a network—something that fits its condition of being related to various intertextual links as well as to its multiple

pathways of meaning. Cut off from authorial intention or originary links and constituted through endless networks within and without, a text affords an open-ended reading. Here the author might surface occasionally, but in that case the author's presence is as fictive as any other character in the text. The work predates consumerist capitalist culture, though it perfectly goes well with the ethos of this culture because it is an object of consumption. The text, in contrast, invites production of meaning by the reader. A text is therefore a site of operation of the reader in a domain of production. Here, to elaborate the meaning of production, Barthes brings in the concept of 'play'. The creative, voluntary and 'playful' spirit of play describes the reader's engagement in the production of meaning. Finally, therefore, Barthes elaborates the distinction of pleasure of work and pleasure of text. The most interesting comment, however, comes off in the final paragraph, when Barthes disclaims having used any metalinguistic theory about the text, because it goes against the very character of the text. As Barthes hinted at, you may read Roland Barthes's essay "From Work to Text" as a text!

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UNIT- 3

JACQUES LACAN: AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

3.1 Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 A Brief Life Sketch of The Theorist

3.4 Key Concepts Introduced By The Theorist

3.5 Reception of Lacan's Concepts

3.6 Summing Up

3.7 Model Questions

3.8 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will learn about yet another major 20th century intellectual figure, Jacques Lacan. You will be introduced to the life and works of Lacan through a brief biographical sketch of him. You will then learn about some of the major concepts introduced by the theorist to the fields of psychoanalysis and literary criticism. After going through this unit you will be able to

- *explain* the various stages of development as proposed by Jacques Lacan;
- *analyze* the deconstruction of the human psyche according to Lacan's theory;
- *understand* the lasting impact that Lacanian psychoanalysis had on the field psychology;
- *elucidate* Lacan's take on Freudian psychoanalysis.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

The 20th century was a breakthrough era for psychology and neuroscience. The erstwhile beliefs of the Vitruvian Man with a single identity came into question. With the onset of technological advancements, commencement of devastating wars, the industrial revolution and the scientific discoveries in terms of evolutionary sciences, Man's superior position because of their reason and rationality was scrutinized. In the field of psychoanalysis, especially, this singular, superior identity of human 'I' was broken down into multiple layers of consciousness, by psychoanalysts like Freud and Jacques Lacan. Jacques Lacan was one of the most notable figures of the 20th century intellectual scenario. He was the key practitioner and interpreter of Freudian psychoanalysis. His widespread ideas on the growth and development of an individual had tremendous impact on various fields of study such as literary criticism, continental philosophy, cultural theory and feminist theory. Lacan's ideas are central to the continental philosophical circles.

3.3 A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF THE THEORIST

Often referred to as 'The French Freud', Jacques Lacan was one of the pioneering psychoanalysts of the twentieth century. Lacan had inspired and influenced many theorists, philosophers and psychologists in the modern and post modern school of thought. He was born as Jacques Marie Émile Lacan in 13th of April, 1901 in Paris, France. His father, Alfred Lacan, was a successful entrepreneur. Like his mother, Émilie Baudry, Jacques Lacan had shown intellectual prowess and outstanding academic performance right from his early life.

As a young pupil, he attended the prestigious Lycée Louis Le Grande in Paris where he developed a keen interest in philosophy

and psychology. Lacan grew up in a religious household as his mother was deeply religious. He attended a prestigious Jesuit school from the year 1907 to 1918. His ardent interest in philosophy, from an early age, inspired him to seek deeper meanings and summarizations of the human life, meanings beyond religion. At fourteen, Lacan discovered Spinoza's *Ethics*. His acute research of the same made him question the religious doctrines he was raised on by his mother. Lacan eventually adopted atheism.

Lacan had developed a keen interest in clinical psychology in his early twenties. Trained as a medical psychiatrist, he was engaged actively in his academic pursuit of psychology throughout his scholarship and research. Perhaps one of the first Lacanian academic milestone was the publication of his thesis *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (*On Paranoid Psychosis in its Relations with the Personality*) in the year 1932, which earned him a doctorate degree. He went on to train with the likes of Henry Claude at the Saint Anne Hospital and Gaëtan Gatian de Clerambault at the Henri Rousselle Hospital.

During his time in Paris, Lacan was actively involved with the artistic and literary fields. He was a staunch supporter of the Avant-garde. He had allegedly met James Joyce and had been an audience to the readings of *Ulysses* in both French and English languages. Further, his interactions with Charles Maurras can be presented as evidenced of his keen interest in the contemporary literature, arts and culture. In fact, Lacan was occasionally seen as a fellow traveler along with the Dadaist and Surrealist artistic groups. Lacan's interest in arts, culture and literature will continue to be an overarching influence over his theoretical and philosophical works throughout his academic career.

The 1930s proved to be an academically and professionally active decade for Jacques Lacan. Apart from publishing his doctoral research, he had presented his now famous theory called the ‘Mirror Stage’ at the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) conference at Marienbad in the year 1936. After completing his analysis with Rudolf Lowenstein in 1938, Lacan had joined the Société psychanalytique de Paris. Although, later due to his disagreement over the standardization of the fifty minute analytical trial, he had left the association in the year 1953. During the same decade, Lacan had also published his essay entitled *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu: Essai d’analyse d’une fonction en psychologie* (“The Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual: Attempt at an Analysis of a Function in Psychology”) in the Encyclopédie française in 1938. With the onset of the Second World War, there came a brief halt in Lacan’s psychoanalytical practice. The War exposed Lacan to military psychiatry in France and England. He got introduced to British psychoanalytical theory and practice during the 1940s. This decade also marks the publication of some of his most influential essays like Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism” (1945); “Presentation on Psychical Causality” (1946); “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis” (1948); and “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience (1949). These essays were later cumulated in what is known as his Magnum Opus, *Écrits* (1966).

In the subsequent decades, Lacan became increasingly influenced by ideals of Structuralism proposed by thinkers like Claude Levi Strauss and Roman Jakobson. Influenced by the structuralist ideals of conserving the societal structures, Lacan promoted himself as the defender of the original Freudian psychoanalysis. He further promoted Freudian structuralist psychoanalysis under the headline

of 'return to Freud'. He preached the superiority of language as the reflection of the psyche. According to Lacan, language was the key to clinical and analytical psychiatry. Lacan was strictly against the new-age 'anti Freudian' psychoanalysis and had expressed his desires to protect Freudian practices in an almost orthodox manner.

Jacques Lacan career has been hallmarked by his long standing tradition of oral teachings, rather than the written ones, in the form of seminars. He had first started delivering his seminars at the Saint Anne Hospital during the decade from 1953 to 1963. Eventually, he shifted his venue for his seminars to École Normale Supérieure and then to the Faculty of Law. Lacan's seminars drew an audience full of a range of various professionals from psychologists to philosophers, from artists to academicians. Lacan's seminars became the hub of intellectual activities in the Parisian academia. Philosophers like Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault and Luce Irigaray were some of the notable people in his audience. Lacan's seminars were an interdisciplinary academic venture seeping into diverse fields like politics, history, literature, feminism etcetera. Lacan's philosophical and theoretical influence was not limited to France alone. He had presented several lectures at various US universities including Harvard, Columbia, MIT and Johns Hopkins University.

Some of Lacan's most imminent works include *Écrits* (1966), *Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique* (1953–1954), *Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (1954–1955), *Book III: The Psychoses*, *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), and *Book XX: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*.

Jacques Lacan had a profound impact on the academic landscape of France and England. His works continue to influence psychoanalytical traditions across the world. Lacan's seminars been

used in various philosophical and academic fields and continue to be studied in various university syllabuses. Thus, Jacques Lacan can be named as one of the most important psychoanalysts after Sigmund Freud. He passed away in Paris, France on 9th of September, 1981.

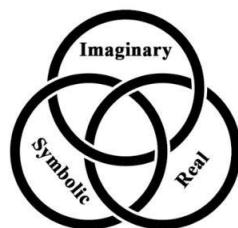
Check Your Progress:

Q. How did Jacques Lacan's seminars become a hallmark of his career?

Q. Where did he present his seminars?

3.4 KEY CONCEPTS INTRODUCED BY JACQUES LACAN

Jacques Lacan was the pioneering contributor to the development of the Register Theory. Throughout his several seminars, Lacan proposed that there are three stages of the development of the



human psyche. He claimed that these stages of development, or registers, are interlinked as well as interdependent on each other, wherein, the breakdown of one of the stage would lead to the collapse of the whole order of the

human psyche. Lacan used the image of the Borromean knot to demonstrate his theory of developmental psyche. The Borromean knot is often seen on the garments of the Borromero family, representing solidarity to one another. Each circle of the Borromean knot symbolises each stage of development. The three stages, according to Lacan, are the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real.

3.4.1 The Imaginary

Lacan considers the Imaginary stage as an in-between space between the conscious and the subconscious. This is the stage where the development of the ego occurs, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis. This term Imaginary is derived from the term 'image' by Lacan. As such, it represents the development of one's ego, with reference to one's own image. The psychological self, or selves, and the corresponding physical entity align with each other in this stage of the development of human psyche. This alignment is what constitutes one's own identity and subsequent identification. Here, Lacan, unlike Freud, depicts the ego as the developing self identity during the Imaginary stage of development.

Lacan further associates the Imaginary with the term 'imaginary'. As in, the ego, thus formed in this stage, is associated with the imagination of the self and the world. Concepts like what one imagines one to be, what one imagines others to be, and their corresponding behavior according to their specific imaginations fall under the overall theory of the Imaginary stage. Thus, Lacan also suggests that the self is an imaginary and constructed formation and it does not constitute a fixed, pre determined identity. The identity of a person is determined by their experiences in the Imaginary stage of development. This Imaginary stage primarily occurs during the early stages of childhood, when a child is still developing their sense of self. One of the most crucial phase of the Imaginary is the 'Mirror Phase', according to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

A The Mirror Phase

Jacques Lacan first introduced his now famous concept of the Mirror phase in the year 1936 at the IPA conference. Although, he was not allowed to finish his presentation then. He later published

his theory in his book *Écrits*. The Mirror phase occurs during a child's psychological development between the ages six to eighteen months after birth. During this period a child begins to recognize their own physical body as being their own self. Lacan states that a human being does not begin to identify their own body up until they are six months old. During this stage, a child has not yet learnt to distinguish between the external world and their own self. This stage, right after birth, precedes the Mirror phase. Lacan names this in-between phase from birth to self identification as 'hommelette'. This term is a portmanteau configuration using the French terms 'homme', meaning a Man, and 'omellete', the savory dish. At this stage, a child is not yet a 'homme', or a Man. Further, at this stage, the child has not yet identified their own body.

This period is then followed by the Mirror phase. The child, between six to eighteen months of age, begins to recognize the reflection of their bodies on the mirror as their own selves. This identification of self on the mirror is crucial for the psychological development as it is then that the child begins to think of oneself as a comprehensive identity. The child has otherwise been conceiving their sense of self as fragmented bodily parts that they have not learnt to control. Upon seeing the reflection of their selves on the mirror, the child perceives themselves as a whole, rather than fragmented parts. This contradiction between the fragmented conscious self and the unitary physical body forms the imaginary identity, the 'I', of the child. Further, the child derives pleasure from seeing their reflections in the mirror, as unlike their inability to optimally control their motor movements, they can control the reflection.

The Mirror phase is further associated with the identification of the image reflected on the mirror as the their own selves. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the ego, which Lacan defines as the ideal

‘I’ is formed by the association of the reflection to one’s self. Thus, the reflection becomes the ‘I’ instead of who he/she/they are. Rather than the physical corporeal self, the reflection becomes the ego, the ‘I’. Lacan, therefore, analyses the formation of ego with two terms, misrecognition and alienation. The child misidentifies the reflection as their self. The reflection is not their corporeal body. It is merely an illusion. Thus the ‘I’ which is formed by the image on the mirror is also misconstrued outside the physical body of the individual. This leads to a sense of alienation from their self. The ‘I’ is physically located outside the body, on the mirror. Thus, according to Lacanian theory, one’s self identity is based around an alien reflection of one’s self on the mirror. On the other hand, the reflection also reduces the self into a one dimensional physical aspect. In contrast, the human self is an amalgamation of complex layers of thoughts, desires, ideas and emotions that goes beyond just the physical self. Lacan is one of the first psychoanalysts to perceive the ego as not a subject, but an object. The ego, which is the reflection of ‘I’, is separate from the subjecthood of an individual.

Stop to Consider:

The Mirror Phase is a concept developed by Jacques Lacan as one of the crucial periods of the Imaginary stage of the development of the psyche. This stage occurs during the period from when the child is six months old to eighteen months old. During this period, the child begins to identify the reflection of their own image on the mirror with their selves. The child learns to associate their selves as a comprehensive whole that is reflected on the mirror. The child derives pleasure upon seeing their reflection as it gives them a sense of wholeness and control over their motor parts. During the Mirror Phase, the child develops the concept of their identity, the ‘I’, in association with the reflection on the mirror.

3.4.2 The Symbolic

The Symbolic stage is the second stage of the development of human psyche. In this stage the child begins to identify, understand and internalize the external symbolic orders that exist in the society. The ideological and philosophical discourses that exist in the society are acquired and understood by the child during this stage. Lacan conceptualized the Symbolic stage on the basis of the structuralist understanding of society. As such, this stage refers to the learning of customs, institutions, laws, mores, norms, practices, rituals, rules, traditions, and so on of cultures and societies.

Lacan based his theories regarding the Symbolic stage on the theories proposed by Structuralist philosopher, Claude Levi Strauss. Strauss argued that there is a structure similar to a grammatical structure that works within kinship relationships. These structures are pre determined and they exist before the existence of the individual. Individuals are bound within those kinship relationships according to the order that the structure suggests. The structures of kinship exist and function before the individual who performs the kinship rules. To exemplify, let us consider a hypothetical marriage between a woman named Neha and a man named Raj. Upon marrying Raj, Neha will be bound within certain kinship relationships with Raj's family and vice versa. These kinship relationships include husband and wife and her in-laws. However, if the woman Neha happens to marry another man, let us assume Rohan, the kinship relationships she will be bound by the marriage will continue to remain the same. Thus, she will have a relationship with her husband (Rohan) and in-laws (Rohan's family). Thus, the structures of marriage and subsequent formation of relationship exist beyond the existence of an individual. The individual is submerged into the preordained kinship structures after they are born. The kinship relationships are therefore independent of the

individuals. According to Strauss' analysis, these structures exist on the basis of the signifier and the signified. In this scenario the signifier is the individual (Neha) and the signified is the relationship that the individual performs, that is, the role of the wife. The signified is a fixed entity from which the signifier derives its significance. Thus, the role of the wife is a predetermined entity which individuals fall into. The role of the wife can only be understood in context with the network of kinships. Therefore, the symbolic structures of the society operate similar to the operation of the signifier and signified within the linguistic structure.

The symbolic structures, motives, discourses and images, therefore, according to Lacan, derive their meanings because of their interrelations and interactions with one another. Lacan claims that the social and psychological order that a human being is born into, precedes the human existence, just like how the kinship relationship precedes human identity. Lacan states that this preexistence of the symbolic order is because the human psyche is structured like a language. In other words, an individual becomes fully human only when they are subjected to the symbolic order of language. It is language which helps one recognize the individual ego 'I'. Thus, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the language preordains one's sense of self in the developmental stages of human psyche. Furthermore, Lacan states that not just the conscious and the sub-conscious, but also the unconscious exercises according to the symbolic order of language. Lacan, famously, said, 'the unconscious is structured like a language'.

The big other and the small other:

Lacan states that there is a distinct sense of alienation in the symbolic structures. The symbolic structures exist outside an

individual. Lacan theorized two specific forms of ‘othering’ that takes place in the Symbolic stage of development. This include the big Other and the small other.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the first form of alienation that takes place is the alienation of self from the ego, or the ‘I’. The ‘I’ that signifies the reflection of oneself on the mirror, becomes the first other. Lacan refers to the reflection of self, that is, one’s ego ‘I’ as another, with a lowercase initial. This other is the small other because it begins and ends with oneself. It is unique to each individual and effects only one’s relationship with oneself. In this sense, the reflection of self on the mirror is a separate entity from the self, another.

On the other hand, Lacan claims that the symbolic order of the language structure is the big Other. Lacan distinguishes this from the small other by using an uppercase initial. This Other, the linguistic structure, is alien to an individual, in the sense that it exists outside the corporeality of the individual. It is external to the individual, just like the small other. However, unlike the small other, the symbolic order of language does begin or cease to exists with the death of an individual. Instead, it exists before the birth of an individual and continues to persists even after one’s death. That is why, language is the big Other. Lacanian theory of the pre-existing structure is equivalent to Hegel’s theory of ‘objective spirit’. Accordingly, the language is a set of inter subjective and trans-subjective contexts that the individual is born into.

Stop to Consider:

The big Other and the small other are two pillars of alienation that an individual experiences. The small other represents the reflection with which one began to associate their identity, the ‘I’ with during

the Mirror stage. This other begins with the perception of oneself and ends with the individual's death. Lacan refers to the reflection of self on the mirror as the other. He uses lowercase initials to distinguish this from the big Other.

The big Other represents the linguistic structures that an individual is born into. The symbolic order of language is alien to an individual because it exists outside the physical self of the individual. The language structure exists before the birth of an individual. It is predetermined and preordained. As such, the individual are effected by the language structure but cannot effect the structure. This big Other exists in the societal and psychological order of the individual.

3.4.3 The Real

This stage of development has been understood as a being notoriously difficult to define. Lacan's explanations of the Real has themselves been vague and elusive. Lacan states that this elusiveness is not a depiction his lethargy. Rather, the Real, is itself, an order that is elusive and difficult to contain within the paradigms of the linguistic order. As opposed to the Imaginary and the Real, which have definitive functions and developmental stages, the Real is defined by the reality beyond the clinical psychology. It is, therefore, incomprehensible by nature.

Initially, Lacan explained the Real as the stage in which the physical existence of the individual that does not require language to be communicated or comprehended. The first hand experiences of the individual through their five senses, constitute the Real. In this sense, the corporeal existence, without the influence of discourses and other symbolic order forms the Real stage of the development of human psyche. Subsequently, Lacan expands on this theory of the

Real. He claims that the Real is self sufficient and 'pure' moment, having no negative space. Due to the lack of negative space in its comprehension, the Real does not require a language system to explain it or complete it. As such, the Real complete part of one's psyche. In his later explanations, Lacan defined the Real as an oscillation between two states of lack and excesses, stability and instability. To justify his claims Lacan exemplifies the figure of the Mother. Lacan states that during the early life of a child, when the child is beginning to internalize the discourses at function in the society, the mother figure, who is the child's primary caretaker, is simultaneously present too close and overwhelmingly near to the child and is impenetrable and elusive to the child. Thus, the mother is at once present and absent. There is an alternation between too much of her and too little of her. Similarly, the Real too oscillates between the self sufficient experience having no negative space and the void.

Through the analysis of the evolution of Lacanian definition of the Real, it can be surmised that the Real is something that consistently escapes the symbolic structures of language. This is a reality that constantly escapes the articulation through language. The Real, therefore, is a space where language itself fails as a method of communication. One's realization of their encounter with the Real is rare and far between. Often these encounters are realized through traumatic experiences where language and memory fails as an appropriate method of articulation. For example, when one faced a near death experience, one is often stunned and rendered speechless. The experience with fatality makes it difficult to be described or communicated through the symbolic order of language. Thus, in that moment language fails and the symbolic order collapses. Victims of trauma also experience a similar failure of language when they are asked to describe their trauma. The trauma, therefore, is positioned

in their life as ‘black hole’, or a negative space, that they cannot explain. Lacan would identify these instances as one’s encounter with the real.

SAQ:

Q. If the Real is defined as the register that constantly escapes articulation through language, can the phase ‘hommelette’, which precedes the Mirror phase constitute the Real? Does the Real then precede the Imaginary stage of development of human psyche?

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3.4.4 The Libidinal Economy

Jacques Lacan expands upon the Freudian concept of drive, which is defined as the underlying motivational economy for the psyche. In his expansion of the Freudian concept, Lacan reworks and destabilizes the previously established theories and initiates a new discourse.

Needs, Demands and Desire

Needs and demands are the two pillars of Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud maintains that every human being is born with certain biological requirements, the fulfilment of which is detrimental to the survival of the human being. These requirements sustain the life of the organism. These include requirements like food, water, clothing to maintain a specific bodily temperature etcetera. Freud defines these requirements with the term ‘needs’. Thus, a human being is born into this world with certain preordained needs that must be

fulfilled to ensure their survival. As the infant has not yet acquired control over their motor movements, they cannot fulfill those needs by themselves. As such, they require assistance and help from the people around them, or from Others. This, according to Freud, is the primary responsibility of the parents.

These unavoidable needs and the inability to fulfill the needs by themselves renders the infant helpless. It also implies that the infant must learn to articulate the needs with the help of the language of the Other, or the social and symbolic order. Even before the acquisition of language, an infant uses gesticulations like crying or screaming to express their needs. The parents, in turn, attempt to understand those gestures and react accordingly like providing food, warmth etcetera. This creates a cycle in which the infant begins to understand the correlation between the gestures and their needs being met. The gestures with which the infants articulate their needs and the subsequent fulfillment of the same create a cycle of demands. Demands are the gestures or articulations of one's needs. However, with time the demands exceed the paradigm of mere biological requirements and encompass psychological requirements as well.

To properly express their demands, the child eventually learns the language to communicate. The acquisition of the social construct of the language binds the child into a specific social order, or the big Other. Thus, the child, even from an early age, is made to learn to abide by the rules and regulations of the symbolic order to express their demands. This includes norms like etiquettes, saying 'please' and 'thank you', being polite and the like. Thus, demands bind the child with a specific set of norms that the symbolic Other imposes. This continues even into one's adulthood, where they continue to make demands, despite being able to fulfill their physical needs

themselves. Thus, demands constitute wants which are beyond just the physical needs of an individual.

Lacan expands on this theory by adding another pillar to needs and demands, that is, desire. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, desires lie in between needs and demands. Lacan proposed that desires can be defined by subtracting needs from demands. In other words, desires are demands which are beyond the biological needs of survival of a human being. Lacan further maintains that all desires are borne out of love. Every desire of an individual, whether a child or an adult, is ultimately a demand for love from the Others. For example, when an infant cries for attention, they are really seeking love from their parents. Similarly, even in adult romantic relationships, the demands for gifts, a romantic time spent together, sexual activities or saying the phrase, 'I love you' are basically demands seeking reassurance from their partners of their love. Further, the desires that stem out of seeking love are an impossibility, according to Lacan. He claims that since an individual associates the love with the symbolic order of the society, complete satisfaction of their desire is not possible. One often seeks complete satisfaction in material things, or societal norms and regulations, which lies beyond the realm of the Real. That is why, individuals are constantly seeking their desires to be satisfied, by their parents, friends, material things, or even by their own selves in vain.

Drive and Jouissance

Lacan establishes a difference between desire and drive. According to Lacan desire, by its nature, is restless. It is constantly in pursuit of love. Consequently, the constant pursuit of desire gives way to frustrations. Desire finds the constant chase for love frustrating and activating. On the other hand, Lacan maintains that where desire is

stuck in the endless dissatisfying search, drive derives a perverse pleasure from the unattainable search of the desire. The same reason which is a cause of frustration for desire becomes a source of pleasure for drive. Where desire is irritated, drive is gratified. Further, drive gains satisfaction from the process of aspiring love (desire) from one aspect of life to another.

Lacanian analysis of the drive leads him to the concept of 'Jouissance'. Similar to the theory of the Real, Lacan had been vague and elusive about the meaning of Jouissance. This is a French term that had not been appropriately translated pertaining to the lack of equivalent terminology in English language. The English equivalent 'enjoyment' fails to properly describe the French term.

Lacan describes Jouissance in relation to his theory of distinction between desire and drive. He builds upon the Freudian theory that all drives are ultimately 'death drivers'. That is, human beings subconsciously derive pleasure from their 'death drivers'. Similarly, in Lacanian analysis, the individual derives pleasure from the constant frustration because of the dissatisfaction of desire. The pleasure that drive derives from the failure of desire can be termed as Jouissance. That is to say, that this 'enjoyment' is borne out of frustrations or sometimes trauma. The habit of the human psyche of repeating and remembering the traumatic or sorrowful experiences that one has also falls into this category of Jouissance, that is enjoyment beyond pleasure. As such, both Freud and Lacan maintains that human beings contain a certain sense of masochism, which makes one derive 'enjoyment' out of frustration.

Stop to Consider:

Needs are the biological requirements of an individual without the fulfilment of which survival of the individual is not possible. Needs

can be defined in terms of the organic corporeal requirements like food, air and water.

Demands can be defined as the gesticulation or articulation of the needs of the individual. The child learns to articulate their needs through a pre-existing set of rules and regulations as ordained by a specific language. The subsequent fulfillment of their needs reassure the child that if they make their demands, their needs will be satisfied. Eventually, demands move beyond the physical needs of the individual and take the form of wants.

Desire can be explained as the space between needs and demands. Desire is derived by subtracting needs from the demands. That is, the excess demands which lie beyond the physical essential needs are desires. All desires are essentially a demand for love. Desire also constitutes a constant and never-ending pursuit of love, which leads to frustrations.

3.5 RECEPTION OF LACAN'S CONCEPTS

Jacques Lacan attained a status akin to a celebrity throughout his academic career. He was popular amidst the intellectual scenario of Paris and even the US. Lacan's concepts and practices have been a source of polarizing controversies right from the beginning of his career. He had received both praise and scorn from his contemporaries.

Lacan's adamant attempt at 'returning to Freud' was met with certain amount of admiration from the followers of Freud. They perceived his attempts as a way of repopularizing Freudian psychoanalysis. On the other hand, critics often claimed that Lacan's concepts and theories were not Freudian. Instead, they were original concepts themselves. One of the startling difference between Freud

and Lacan is the way of their writings. Critics often cite the contradiction between Freud's easy-to-read, conversational language with Lacan's complex, almost mathematical language as a point of difference between the two.

Lacan's practice of psychoanalysis was also a point of contention between the psychiatrists of the time. In contrast to the Freudian practice of fifty minutes sessions, Lacan made his sessions with his patients unpredictable with their durations. Sometimes the sessions may go on for hours on end and other times the sessions were stopped after only few minutes. This irregularity in his practice drew several criticisms from his contemporaries. For his variable sessions, Lacan was consequently expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in the year 1963. This betrayal wounded Lacan greatly. In response to this decision of the IPA, Lacan founded his own association for the practice of psychoanalysis called *École de la Cause Freudienne* (ECF), or School of the Freudian Cause. He would continue to operate with this association throughout the rest of his career. However, he dissolved the association in the year 1980 stating, 'I, however, am a Freudian'.

Lacan's ideas were met enthusiastic responses from many intellectuals of his time. He was particularly popular among the post-structuralist, the feminists and the new-age psychoanalysts. Intellectual figures like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva, who were deeply influenced by his ideas on language, subjectivity, and the psyche. Lacan's novel concepts later became influential beyond psychoanalysis as subjects like cultural theory, literary criticism and philosophy embraced his ideas to justify or explain their own predicaments. Thus, Jacques Lacan was a highly controversial and a highly influential figure of the 20th century.

Check Your Progress:

Q. What was the major cause of disagreement between the orthodox psychoanalysts of IPA and Jacques Lacan?

3.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you have been introduced to one of the most notable psychoanalysts of the 20th century, Jacques Lacan. You have read through a brief biographical sketch of the psychoanalyst which will help you to identify the major socio-political influences in his works. You have then analyzed some of the major concepts proposed by Lacan. You have learnt about his ideas of the three stages of development of the human psyche, namely the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. You have briefly touched upon some of the important terminologies and what they imply in Lacanian psychoanalysis like the Mirror stage, the two Other/other, drive and Jouissance. Finally, you have analyzed some of the responses to Lacan's psychoanalysis by his peers.

3.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. How is Lacan's conception of the ego constructed in the Mirror stage of psychological development?
2. Critically explain the three registers of the development of human psyche according to Lacanian psychoanalysis.
3. What does Lacan mean by the "Real" as a pre-symbolic, traumatic dimension, and how does it relate to the "Symbolic" order of language and social norms?
4. What are the two forms of alienation that happens with the construction of the ideal 'I'? Explain in terms of the big other and small other.

5. Elucidate the correlation between needs, demands and desires.
6. How does drive contradict desire?
7. What are the main criticisms of Lacan's theory, such as its perceived obscurity, overemphasis on language, or limitations in addressing social and cultural factors?

3.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT – 4

JACQUES LACAN: SEMINAR ON THE PURLOINED LETTER

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 A Brief Introduction to the Theorist
- 4.4 A Brief Summary of the Purloined Letter
- 4.5 Reading the Text
- 4.6 Summing Up
- 4.7 Modal Questions
- 4.8 Suggested Readings and References

4.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will get to read Jacques Lacan seminar on The Purloined Letter. You will be first introduced to the short story written by Edgar Allan Poe. You will then read the story through the lens of psychoanalysis as proposed by Jacques Lacan in his seminar. You will get to know about the concepts of the Gaze and Repetition Compulsion. After a thorough reading of this unit, you will be able to

- *analyze* Poe's short story through a psychoanalytical perspective;
- *explain* the Lacanian concept of the Gaze;
- *understand* the significance of language in the reflection of the Unconscious;

- *explain* the role that Lacan states the psychoanalyst must play in helping their patients overcome their trauma.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Jacques Lacan is one of the most notable psychoanalysts of the 20th century. His wide array of works focus upon the representation of the unconscious on one's behavioral patterns. Interestingly, Lacan preferred to communicate his ideas, concepts and theories through verbal lectures, rather than through written texts. As such, Lacan's series of seminars delivered in various institutions across France and the US became a hallmark of his career. One such seminar is his seminar on the short story written by the famous author of detective fiction Edgar Allan Poe called *The Purloined Letter*. In his interdisciplinary approach towards analyzing this short story Lacan derives examples of various psychoanalytical concepts at work throughout the story. Lacan reads Poe's detective fiction through the lens of Psychoanalysis. This seminar was delivered in the year 1956 at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. This seminar remains a seminal work for understanding Lacanian theories and psychoanalysis, in general.

4.3 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORIST

Jacques Lacan was one of the most influential psychoanalysts of the 20th century. Born on 13 April 1901 to Alfred Lacan and Émilie Baudry in Paris, Jacques Lacan was raised in a strictly religious upper class household. He had received his formal education from Lycée and soon developed a keen interest in psychoanalysis and philosophy. By the 1920s, Lacan had established himself as a medically trained psychiatrist working in the prestigious hospitals

such as Saint Anne and Rousselle Hospital. He was actively involved in the intellectual scenario of Paris in 1920s and 1930s. Publication of his doctoral thesis *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (On Paranoid Psychosis in its Relations with the Personality) in 1932 marked the beginning of his rise to stardom as one of the most significant contributors to the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy, linguistics and literary theory.

Lacan is often referred to as 'The French Freud' because of his extensive research and analysis of Freud's psychoanalysis. Throughout his career Lacan insisted upon the need of modern day psychology to 'return to Freud'. As such, several of his ideas and concepts stem out as expansions and sometimes even disruption of Freud's concepts and ideas. His studies of Freud's work became foundational to his intellectual development, but Lacan eventually diverged from traditional Freudian psychoanalysis, moving toward a more linguistically-oriented understanding of the human psyche. Lacan's contribution towards Freudian psychoanalysis had been invaluable to those who had been interested in the philosophical dimensions of Freud's psychoanalysis.

One of the major concepts proposed by Lacan is the Register theory. The Register theory proposes a three tier development of the human psyche, that is, the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. Lacan maintains that a crucial stage of the psychological development of a human being is the Mirror stage, where the child learns to recognize the reflection of his self on the mirror and starts to identify with it. Lacan builds upon the Freudian concept of the ego. However, contrary to Freud, Lacan states that the ego is the illusion that the child recognizes themselves with in the mirror, the ideal 'I'. Further, Lacan also builds upon the Freudian concept of needs and demands. He adds the concept of desire to the delicate balance of needs and demands by stating that desires are merely demands for love. On the

other hand, Lacan introduces the idea of the Other to the field of psychoanalysis. In his theory, the Other operates on the human psyche on two levels, the big Other and the small other, in which the big Other is the symbolic order that a child is born into and the small other is one's own alienated self.

Lacan's works and practices were a cause of both controversy and admiration in the intellectual scenario of Paris. Lacan rebelled against the orthodox practice of conducting fifty minute sessions with the clients. His variable duration of the sessions earned him some criticism from the International Psychoanalytical Association, from where he was expelled. Further, his complex and rather mathematical style of writing earned him the complaint of being unnecessarily difficult to read. His rift with the mainstream psychoanalytical traditions will continue throughout his career. Contrastingly, Lacan's ideas were deemed as important and revolutionary by many. He was a popular figure amongst the philosophical, political and literary academicians like Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray. Them and several other known personalities had attended several of his seminars, which became his preferred mode of sharing his ideas instead of written publications. Lacan's series of seminar lectures spanned over three decades.

Some of Lacan's most imminent works include *Écrits* (1966), *Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique* (1953–1954), *Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (1954–1955), *Book III: The Psychoses*, *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), and *Book XX: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*.

Lacan's ideas had a profound impact upon multiple fields of study. His ideas have been incorporated into post-structuralist and

postmodernist thoughts by contemporary philosophers like Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. Finally, Lacan's theories have proved to be significant in analyzing various cultural artefacts and their impact on the human psyche like films, advertisement media etcetera. Jacques Lacan's death on September 9, 1981 had, therefore, left a significant void in the fields of psychoanalysis and philosophy.

Check Your Progress:

Q. Briefly explain why Jacques Lacan is often referred to as 'The French Freud'.

4.4 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PURLOINED LETTER

Published first in the year 1844, *The Purloined Letter* is a short story written by perhaps the pioneer of detective fiction, Edgar Allan Poe. This short story is the third in his collection of short stories containing the character C. Auguste Dupin as the detective, the other two being 'The Murders in The Rue Morgue' and 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt'. Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin is considered to be a significant early prototype of the classical, cunning and wise detective character, who is able to solve all mysteries, that has become a common trope in fictions and films. Poe begins his story with a quote from *Seneca*, 'Nil sapientiac odiosius acumine nimio', which translates to 'Nothing is so hateful to wisdom as an excess of cleverness'. The author cleverly depicts the failure of this excess of cleverness through the intellectual tussle between the detective Dupin and the Minister D.

The story begins in one 'gusty evening in the autumn of 18' when the unnamed narrator had been sitting with detective Dupin contemplating about his earlier cases like the Rue Morgue and

Marie Rogêt. They were interrupted by an old acquaintance, Monsieur G, who was the Prefect of the Parisian police. Monsieur G arrived with yet another peculiar case for detective Dupin. However, interestingly, there seem to be no particular mystery in this case to be solved.

Monsieur G brings to Dupin's attention that an act of theft had occurred at the queen's royal chambers. A letter had been stolen from the queen's desk by Minister D who swapped the letter with his own duplicitous copy. Further, this act of theft happened right in front of the Queen who had seen the swapping of the letter but due to the presence of the King, from whom the letter must be kept confidential, she had been unable to guard it well. Monsieur G also reveals that the letter contains certain sensitive and confidential information that would cause a scandal, if being made public. The police department of Paris, had been appointed to retrieve the letter from Minister D, who had been blackmailing the Queen with the content of the letter. Monsieur G, further, tells the narrator and Auguste Dupin that the police department had searched in all possible places and yet they had been unable to retrieve the letter from Minister D. The Prefect, therefore, asked detective Dupin to help them solve this issue. The issue must be solved in secrecy from the King as well as the general citizens. The matter of secrecy becomes the overarching theme of this short story.

The Prefect states that the police department of Paris had searched through all the property of Minister D but they have been unable to retrieve the letter. The letter had been hidden in the most secret of places and therefore he asks detective Dupin's help in finding the letter. Dupin remarks that the retrieving of the letter depends upon 'the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber'. Dupin then suggests that the police department must search Minister D's hotel(apartment) again. He requests a description of the letter

and upon hearing Prefect's depiction of the letter, Auguste Dupin creates a duplicate letter of his own. Following Dupin's suggestions, the Prefect and the Police department carries out their search for the letter again. Yet, they were unable to retrieve it from Minister D's possession. Frustrated and exhausted, the Prefect returns to detective Dupin's house and declares that a sum of 50,000 Francs would be awarded to anyone who is able to retrieve the letter. The narrator states that it is at this moment that detective Dupin demands Monsieur G to transfer the money to him as he produces the infamous letter and hands it over to Monsieur G. Both the narrator and the Prefect are stunned by Auguste Dupin's ability of retrieving the letter from the thief's hand.

Detective Dupin explains to the narrator that the Prefect and the Police department, although efficient and capable in their search, did not take into account the psychology of Minister D. To further elucidate, Dupin cited the example of a schoolboy playing the game of odds and evens, where there may be variable outcomes depending on the players' knowledge of each other's psyche as well as their circumstances. Dupin states that the Prefect and the Police department assumed that the letter must be hidden with utmost care by Minister D as it held sensitive information that could potentially cause a scandal for the Queen. They expected the letter to be hidden in the most secret of places and therefore they had searched every nook and corner of his apartment. However, Dupin was able to understand Minister D's psyche and therefore he knew that the letter was, instead, hidden casually in plain sight. Dupin knew that someone as clever as Minister D would consider the Police department's obvious train of thought and would hide the letter in plain sight, where the Police would not look for.

Dupin explains to the narrator that he had gone to visit Minister D in disguise and had worn tinted glasses to cover his eyes as he scanned

through D's room for the letter. He had spotted the letter in the card rack full of other letters, hanging on the mantelpiece. Minister D had purposely made the letter seem old and wrinkled. Dupin leaves the Minister's apartment and then returns the next day with an identical copy of the letter in his hand. He arranged for a breakout of a false street fight which would distract the Minister. As the Minister glanced out of the window to check on the ruckus happening on the street, detective Dupin discreetly replaces the real letter for the identical duplicate copy. This is how, Dupin explains, he was able to retrieve the original letter. He was able to outsmart the Minister by using the Minister's clever act of theft against him. Dupin concludes his explanation by saying the he had not left the duplicate copy of the letter empty. Instead, he had written a quotation from *Atrée et Thyeste*, written by Prosper Joylot de Crebillon, 'Un dessein si funeste, / S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste', which translates to "If such a sinister design is not worthy of Atreus, it is worthy of Thyestes".

Check Your Progress:

Q. Why did detective Dupin ask the Prefect to give him the awarded sum of money?

Q. How did Dupin retrieve the letter from Minister D?

4.5 READING THE TEXT

One of the most significant psychoanalysts of the 20th century, Jacques Lacan's infamous Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter' has been regarded as a notable example of analyzing a literary text through the lens of psychoanalysis. Lacan delivered this seminar in the year 1956 at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. In this

seminar, Lacan examined the short story *The Purloined Letter*, written by Edgar Allan Poe and derived certain concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan reads the short story not just as a narrative, but as a complex metaphors of psychology such as the unconscious, desire and the concept of subjectivity. He begins his seminar by citing the German poet Christian Morgenstern, 'Und wenn eJ uns gliickt, Und wenn eJ sich schickt, So sind eJ Gedanken', which translates to, 'And if it succeeds for us; And if it is fitting; Then they are thoughts'.

4.5.1 The Three Glances

Lacan begins his seminar by addressing the concept of 'Repetition Automatism'. This is concept which was first put forward by Sigmund Freud in his 1920 essay called 'Beyond The Pleasure Principle'. Freud maintains that the subconscious mind of an individual repeats and remembers certain traumatic experiences again and again, even when it causes suffering for the individual. This behavior of the subconscious is rooted in the theory of *drive* which states that the human mind derives pleasure from pain. This repetition of traumatic memories reflect in the repetition of certain behavioral patterns by an individual. Some examples of repetition automatism are individuals repeatedly following the same routine to do a specific task like putting on their clothes or cooking etcetera or people repeatedly falling into the same cycles of love and betrayal, knowing that the person they love is causing them to suffer. Lacan ruminates on this concept of repetition automatism and expands on it. He states that the patterns repeated can be recognized as a part of the symbolic order. This repetition of certain patterns are visible through fictional works as well. It reflects how the society, of which fiction is a good reflection of, also functions along certain

established patterns, or, as Lacan puts it ‘game of odds and evens’. Lacan then concentrates on the short story by Poe, to identify the patterns that are repeated by the characters in the story. In doing so, Lacan identifies three specific glances that are repeated in two specific and similar situations in the story. Lacan states that Poe’s story places intersubjectivity at the core and demonstrates how the subjective positions keep shifting from one signifier to the next, despite which the underlying structures remain the same.

The theorist states that the primal scene which establishes the intersubjective dynamic of repetitive actions is the scene at Queen’s chambers, the royal *boudoir*. The Queen, who is a person of extreme importance and power, receives a letter upon which she becomes embarrassed. Lacan then states that the embarrassment that she feels is heightened when the King enters the chambers. If the King finds out about the content of the letter, the Queen’s life and position would be in jeopardy. That is why, she attempts to conceal the letter by placing it on top of other letters, ‘face down, address uppermost’, to prove that the letter is insignificant. However, at such an inopportune time Minister D enters the room and notices the letter and the Queen’s distress. He cleverly swaps the original letter with another one right in front of the Queen and leaves the room. Lacan surmises that the quotient of this situation is that ‘the Minister has filched from the Queen her letter and chat-an even more important result than the first-the Queen knows chat he now has it, and by no means innocently.’(Lacan). Further, the remainder of this situation is that the Queen could not react to the theft as reacting to it would have drawn the King’s attention to the content of the letter. Here, Lacan states that three specific glances are at play. The first glance is that of the king, who sees nothing. The second glance is that of the Queen, who sees that the first (King) sees nothing and believes that their secret is secure. The third glance is that of the minister,

who sees that the first two glances have left exposed what should be hidden and seizes it. Lacan, further, states that this pattern of the three glances is repeated in the second situation in this story, although the subjectivity of each glance shifts in the second situation.

The second situation occurs at the Minister's office. The Prefect explains that the Police department had searched every nook and corner of the hotel room to retrieve the letter, during the Minister's habitual nightly walks. These nightly absences allowed the Police department to search thoroughly through the Minister's room. Yet they have not been able to find the letter. Therefore like the King, the Police does not notice the letter. When Dupin arrives at the Minister's hotel, the Minister acts with studied nonchalance. He acts casually and without panic or haste. Detective Dupin is able to identify his pretenses and spots the letter at the mantelpiece. When he returns the next day to the Minister's office to retrieve his 'forgotten' snuffbox, Dupin is armed with a facsimile of the letter. During the distraction of the street fight, the detective replaces the original letter with the facsimile. Minister, however, does not notice this swap. As Dupin leaves Minister's office, Minister D believes that the letter is stored on the mantelpiece. The Minister does not realize that the letter had been successfully retrieved by detective Dupin. Thus, Lacan points out that, like the Queen, in this situation, the Minister sees that the police had not been able to see the letter and therefore believes in his own security. He, however, does not see Dupin's deception. In the other hand, like the Minister in the first situation, Dupin sees that the Minister had left the letter exposed to him and, thus, is able to seize it. In the second situation, the inter-subjective positions of the three glances shift and yet the pattern of repetition remains the same. The first glance is embodied by the Police department, the second glance is embodied by the

Minister and the third glance is embodied by detective Auguste Dupin. The quotient of the operation is that the Minister no longer has the letter, but far from suspecting that Dupin is the culprit who has ravished it from him, knows nothing of it'(Lacan). Lacan equates the three glances to the age-old tale of Ostriches where one ostrich buries its head in the ground to escape danger (therefore sees nothing), the other, upon seeing that the first had buried its head deems itself safe (therefore sees that the first sees nothing) and the third who plucks upon the feathers of the second (therefore sees that the first two had left their feathers exposed). Lacan further states that the repetition of the patterns in the story displaces the subjectivity of the characters, particularly the Minister's, who is at once the all-knowing third glance, and the vulnerable second glance. In his displacement of subjectivity and placing him in the position previously held by the Queen, many argues that the Minister is also made to be feminine and therefore lose his *phallus*.

Stop to Consider:

Repetition automatism is a concept proposed by Sigmund Freud. He stated that the subconscious mind constantly remembers and reminds the individuals about their traumatic past experiences again and again. These translate to repetition of certain actions by the individual, even when it causes them pain. For example, the repeatedly forming relationships with a people of similar attributes, or people whose parents were distanced from them during their childhood forming relationships with people who may also be similarly distant.

Lacan identifies the patterns of repetition in Poe's short story in the form of three glances. The first glance is completely oblivious to the situation, that is, the King and the Police. The second glance knows

that the first is unaware and that is why assumes that they are secure, that is, the Queen and the Minister. The third glance notices that the first two glances have left the object of importance exposed to the public, that is, the Minister and the detective Auguste Dupin.

4.5.2 The Letter as the Signifier

Lacan states that the repetition automatism that is evident in the text ‘The Purloined Letter’ is not merely a reflection of the patterns and underlying structures in Poe’s story, but also, reiterate the presence of the Symbolic Order. The Symbolic Order, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is defined as the discourses, ideals, and societal norms and regulations that are internalized by the individual. This forms the Big Other which governs individuals actions and thoughts, both overtly and covertly. In the story, Lacan points out the presence of the symbolic order which governs the actions of the subjects, the Queen, the Minister, the Prefect and Auguste Dupin. These characters do not intentionally repeat the patterns of behavior. Rather, they are governed by their unconscious which compels them to fall into repetition automatism. The actions of the characters are not isolated events. They are, instead, a part of the symbolic network. That is why Lacan states, ‘the unconscious remains the discourse of the Other’. The subjects, that is, the characters in the story are part of the ‘immixture of subjects’ where their unconscious is guided by the symbolic order and their mirrored actions. In this stage, Lacan examines how the subjects experience displacement from their positions. The repeated displacement places the subjectivity of the situation on the letter itself.

Lacan states that the letter, in the context of the story, is not merely an object. Rather, it is a symbol, or signifier, of the displacement and attachments that the characters have with the letter. ‘We shall see

that [the subjects'] displacement is determined by the place which a pure signifier — the purloined letter — comes to occupy in their trio (Lacan)'. As Lacan states that the letter is a 'pure signifier', the content of the letter becomes unimportant. The letter itself, not the content, drives the following course of action. Since the letter is deemed as the pure signifier, the concept of repetition automatism becomes even more solidified. This is because, repetition automatism occurs when the pure signifier drives the subject's displacement. This is exemplified in the story as it is the letter which creates an emotional response in the character's minds, like fear and anxiety of the Queen, and moves them to predictable patterns of action.

Lacan then questions the genre of the detective fiction. He claims that 'The Purloined Letter' cannot be grouped into just one genre, that is, the police mystery. Although, Poe's stories are some of the earliest prototypes of this highly effective and famous genre, Lacan states that judging the story as a police mystery might lead to an 'over rationalized' interpretation of the story. The elements of a police mystery, 'its nature and motives, instruments and execution, the procedure used to discover the author, and the means employed to convict him' is evidently absent from the story, according to Lacan. He also maintains that this is a deliberate attempt of the author to keep the readers in suspense and reiterate the significance of the letter as a signifier that drives the story. The readers are made aware of the object of deceit, the letter, right from the beginning of the story. Further, the readers also know the culprit and the crime. Thus, unlike other police mysteries, solving the crime does not involve finding 'who did it?' Further, the reader is also told, rather simply, of the acquisition of the letter by Dupin. Thus, the question is neither 'Will letter be successfully retrieved?' Instead, Lacan states that the suspense of the story lies in how the detective had

retrieved the letter from the Minister. Therefore, the letter takes the position of the pure signifier even for the author and the readers. The letter is both present as well as absent throughout the story, yet it impacts the narrative throughout. The letter is physically present in the story in only one instance, that is, when Dupin returns it to the Prefect. Yet, every action, dialogue and motive in the story is driven by the letter. Thus, the letter governs the symbolic order, both within the narrative and outside of it.

Stop to Consider:

Lacan states that the repetition automatism that occurs in the story is driven by the symbolic order which unconsciously governs the actions of the characters. The character's decisions and subsequent deceit a part of the pattern of action that is driven by the pure signifier, the letter. The physical letter, not its content, forces the characters into certain pattern of action which will be repeated by other characters during the next circumstance, creating a constant displacement of subjectivity.

4.5.3 Other Instances of Repetition Automatism

Throughout the seminar, Jacques Lacan identifies various instances in the story 'The Purloined Letter' where the psychoanalytical concept of Repetition Automatism is at play. Lacan states that due to the symbolic order, this work of fiction portrays the game of odds and evens at various moments. Other than the previously stated pattern of the glances, the short story functions as two distinct types of drama, according to Lacan. The distinctions as identified by the Theorist are 'play without words' and 'play with words'. The first aspect of the short story is a focus on the physical actions at play,

like act of theft, blackmailing, restitution etcetera. On the other hand, the second play invites attention to the wordplay that Dupin engages in. The two forms of drama at play in the short story functions to create a tension between the physical events and Dupin's intellectual narrative. Thus, Lacan states that the distinction between descriptive narration and interpretive narration are structures ingrained by Poe in the story. These differences repeat throughout the narrative creating instances of repetition automatism. To highlight the difference between the two types of drama, Lacan claims that during the initial conversation between the Prefect and Auguste Dupin, the Prefect is the 'deaf' subject and Dupin is 'the one who hears'. This implies that communication cannot be executed appropriately and efficiently if one does not understand the underlying interpretations. That is what creates a sense of confusion and frustration for the Prefect, who is fixated on the physical action of theft, instead of understanding the motive of the culprit, which Dupin understands well. The theorist also states that the readers must read the story through this lens of double narrative. If one only reads through the actions of the story, what Lacan calls a 'shallow reading', then one might not be able to understand the various subjectivity that are at play in the story. The characters take on the subjectivity of other characters. For instance, when explaining the case to Dupin, the Prefect Monsieur G embodies the subjectivity of the Queen to narrate the incident of robbery. In doing so, Lacan maintains that Poe feminizes the Prefect and the subjectivity of the characters is mirrored like the three glances. Thus, the pattern of inter-subjectivity is repeated through the narrative. Interestingly, the subjectivity of all the characters are once removed from the readers as it is the unnamed narrator who embodies them all as he narrates the story.

Lacan breaks down the two sets of drama unfolding in the story into two types of languages that linguistic studies often refer to. These two types of language are the language of the bees and the language of the humans. According to linguistic studies the language of the bees reflects a stoic use of language where the play of signification is definite and structured. Bees communicate through signals locating the objects, wherein the language performs a specific function of direct, practical interaction rather than symbolic meaning. Human languages, on the other hand, have signs which lead to signifiers and signified. This implies that human language cannot be contained within specific functionalities. Human language engages in a symbolic order where each word, each sign, means something beyond the immediate meaning of the word. The contexts, the people involved, the language system, all shift the meaning making process to a more symbolic realm. Lacan also maintains that there are some instances where human beings communicate through the language of the bees, or through specific messaging, without the symbolic order. This happens during cases of hatred and anger. When sharing one's hatred, people communicate specifically through particular signs that usually do go beyond the immediate meaning of the word. Furthermore, Lacan states that the symbolic order of language is reaffirmed through repetition of certain phrases and words. Since according to Lacanian psychoanalysis 'the unconscious is structured like a language', the repetitions within a certain linguistic pattern also reflect the structure of the unconscious of an individual. Lacan exemplifies this by analyzing the various types of languages at play in the story. The first dialogue by the narrator in the story, like the language of the bees, is a passive recounting of the events that transpired. The narrator does not add anything to the dialogues and therefore does not shift it to the symbolic order. Whereas, the dialogues of Dupin

have a tone of interpretation in them. Dupin does not say what he actually means. Instead he adds various layers of symbolic meaning that hides his immediate intentions. Dupin uses the language of humans and with this strategy he is able to outsmart not just the Minister, but also the Prefect. Lacan states that Dupin's use of language is akin to a magician performing a magic trick. The spectators, in this case the narrator, Prefect and the Minister, are left stunned with Dupin's performance. They are unable to decipher how the trick was performed until Dupin recounts the events slowly and simplifies the trick of producing the letter to the Prefect. Dupin's retelling of how he got the letter back from the Minister is akin to a magician slowly demonstrating how a magic trick is being performed, or revealing his secrets. Lacan claims that the unconscious also lies, similarly, in secrecy. The role of the psychoanalyst is to deliberately break down the actions and thoughts of the individuals to ultimately reveal the unconscious, or the trauma that seems to have bound the subject in the loop of repetition automatism. Like how Dupin released the letter, the pure signifier, from the repetition of the three glances, Lacan insists upon the use of language to establish the same for the subjects by the psychoanalysts.

Lacan, finally, explains the functionality of repetition automatism with the help of an example that Auguste Dupin cites in the story itself. Dupin refers to the game of odds and evens to demonstrate his solution to retrieving the lost letter. In this game, one player is designated with even numbers and the other is designated with odd numbers. Dupin states that this game is played by a child prodigy who is able to manipulate the game in certain ways. On the count three, the players' must put forward a certain number from one to five displayed by their fingers. The numbers that each player put forward then will be added and if the summation turns out to be an

odd number, the player designated with 'odd' will get a point and vice versa. For example each players put forward the numbers three and two respectively, then the summation five, which is an odd number, will earn a point for the player designated with 'odd'. In Dupin's example, the child prodigy learns to guess the numbers that his opponent will put forward based on their facial expressions and gestures and thus is able to manipulate the outcome to his liking. He judges his opponents again and again and wins a point each time, creating a cycle of repetition automatism. The opponent does not realize that they are being tricked by the child prodigy. Similarly, Dupin relies on the symbolic order to correctly guess how the Minister, who is clever enough to trick the Queen, would plan to hide the letter in a place that is least likely to be searched by the police, that is, at plain sight. Dupin, thus, is able to understand 'the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber'. Lacan, elaborates on this trickery, that contains the overall plot of the story, and states that the readers are similarly deceived by the author. The readers assume that the trick is revealed by the end of the story and plot has reached its logical conclusion. However, the readers' self assurance may indicate that the author had tricked the reader into believing that the truth is revealed at the end. However, since readers are never made aware of the actual content of the letter, they can never truly know whether the real letter was retrieved by Dupin, or was it simply a deception. Lacan focuses on this trickery to emphasize upon the psychoanalyst's role of letting the id of the individual believe in the success of its deception and secretly retrieving traumatic memories, like Dupin had done, in case of the letter. The psychoanalyst must attempt to make the id believe in its own success of deceiving one's desire and then release the ego to establish equilibrium for their patients.

Stop to Consider:

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the human sub-conscious can be divided into three parts, the id, the ego and the super-ego. The id is the primitive, instinctual part of the psyche that is driven by impulses and desires. It works on achieving pleasure. The ego is the realistic part of the psyche that operates on the external symbolic order. It polices the id from acting on its instincts. The ego rationalizes between the id and super-ego. The super-ego is the moral component of the psyche, representing internalized societal values and standards. Psychological conflicts often arise from the tussle between these three parts of the subconscious.

SAQ:

Q. If the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, is this why Lacan insists in his interpretation on this difference Poe makes (seemingly irrelevant to the plot) between poets and mathematicians?

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4.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you have analyzed one of the seminal texts of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan's Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'. You have briefly read through the biographical sketch of Jacques Lacan. Then you have had an analytical reading of the short story upon which Lacan's seminar is based, 'The Purloined Letter' by Edgar Allan Poe. After understanding the detective story, you have delved into the psychoanalytical reading of the story, as done by Lacan. You have learnt, in detail, about Lacan's concept of

repetition automatism by understanding the repetition of certain patterns and structures throughout the story, like the three glances, the significance of the letter as a signifier, the types of dramatic and linguistic interplay at work and the games of trickery that the author placed in the story. After reading this unit, you are now able to analyze other texts through the lens of psychoanalysis.

4.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What does Lacan mean by “the glance” in the context of the story, and how does it relate to the dynamics of power between the characters?
2. How does Lacan’s interpretation of the story highlight the idea that the “stolen object” is not about its material content but rather its symbolic value within the dynamic of desire?
3. How does Dupin’s detective work represent Lacan’s concept of the analyst, particularly in his ability to “see” what others miss by occupying a position of “knowing ignorance”?
4. Critically explain how the letter is a signifier.
5. What are the two types of drama unfolding in the story, as identified by Lacan?

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links :

- <https://medium.com/@noahjchristiansen/jacques-lacans-seminar-on-the-purloined-letter-6dbedcfcd012>
- <https://fractalontology.wordpress.com/2008/02/21/lacan-and-the-formula-of-the-purloined-letter/>
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UNIT –5

JACQUES DERRIDA: AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 A Brief Life Sketch of The Theorist
- 5.4 Key Concepts Introduced By The Theorist
- 5.5 Derrida's Take on Post Structuralism
- 5.6 Derrida's Take on Language, Speech and Writing
- 5.7 Reception of Derridian Philosophy
- 5.8 Summing Up
- 5.9 Model Questions
- 5.10 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will learn about Jacques Derrida, a pioneering figure of Post Structuralism. We will take a look into his life and identify major factors that might have shaped and influenced his philosophical views as well as analyze certain concepts that have been introduced by him. After reading this unit, you will be able to—

- *explain* Derrida's contribution towards the changing views on language and its intrinsic structure;
- *analyze* the concept of deconstruction and its practical application in various academic field;
- *explain* Derrida's political ideologies and associations;

- *understand* the significance of Jacques Derrida in the field of literary and philosophical theory.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

20th century has been a witness to various tumultuous events which have eventually reshaped the philosophical and theoretical discourses and ideologies. From the devastating World Wars to the ideological conflicts, from the rise of Hitler's fascism to the rapid decolonization of erstwhile colonies, this century has experienced it all. As a result, belief systems and social structures became increasingly fragile. People started questioning the institutions and their ethics. The previously acclaimed and accepted structures of ideological discourse also came into scrutiny. One such theorist who questioned the existing structures, linguistic, philosophical and political, was Jacques Derrida. Derrida's theories emerged as a response to the structuralist discourses of the early 20th century, which relied and upheld the binary oppositions as preordained and rigid structures that cannot be altered. Jacques Derrida brought a radical change in the ways we view language, society and literature.

5.3 A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF JACQUES DERRIDA

Jacques Derrida was born on 15th July, 1930, in El-Biar, a small town near Algiers, in French occupied Algeria. Born to a set of Jewish parents, Moché Derrida and Georgette Safar, Jacques Derrida, who was named Jackie at birth, was raised amidst the tumultuous political and ethnic tensions between the natives of Algeria and the French colonialists. Algeria, of the time, was marked by the colonial oppression, segregation and inequality and the rise of nationalist movements that would eventually lead to The Algerian War of Independence. Thus, Derrida's childhood it

imprinted a political chaos in his mind which would later reflect in his political and philosophical theories.

Derrida was educated at the *École Normale*. Growing up in the time leading to the Second World War, he had experienced an alienation from both the French settler community as well as the Native Algerian community. As a Jew, he suffered from discrimination. He was excluded from his school in 1941. The Vichy government, which ruled for three years, was a supporter of the Nazi regime of Germany and had even participated in the persecution of Jews. Derrida continued his education in 1943 at the *Lycée*. He apparently had a keen interest in sports and had wanted to pursue a career as a footballer. Although, he soon shifted his interest towards academia after having read through the works of Jean Paul Satré. The philosopher had a great influence in Derrida's early academic ventures. In 1950, he went to Paris to pursue his newly developing interest in philosophy. He ultimately joined the famous *Lycée Louis-le-Grand*. There he conducted his extensive research on Husserl and wrote an equivalent of an MA thesis on him which was later published. Derrida became one of the most notable scholars of the time.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. Describe the socio political conditions of Algeria in 1930s where Jacques Derrida was born.

Q. 2. What were the socio political influences that impacted Derrida's philosophy and worldview?

Derrida began his academic career as a teacher at the *Lycée le Mans*. During his early career as a teacher, he was deeply engaged in the

practice and research of Edmund Husserl's *Phenomenology* and Claude Levi Strauss and Saussure's *Structuralism*. He presented his first academic paper in the year 1959. Subsequently, the year 1966 was the major breakthrough year for Jacques Derrida. He attended a conference on Structuralism in John Hopkins University and presented his greatly acclaimed paper called 'Structure, Signs and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. His speech created the rupture in the established believes of Structuralism and eventually became a seminal text on Post Structuralism. This became one of his most widely read papers. Following his sensational speech at the American university, Derrida published three major books in the year 1967 which secured his international reputation as a philosopher and thinker of importance. These publications were *Speech and Phenomena*, *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*. While *Speech and Phenomena* demonstrates his research on Husserl, *Writing and Difference* is a collection of essays that lays down the framework of his ideas of deconstruction. *Of Grammatology* is considered by many as his masterpiece, in which, Derrida argues against the traditional privileges of speech over writing. He had, by then, attained the reputation of one of the most notable thinkers of the modern times. Towards the end of his career Derrida had over 40 publications. Some of the major works of Derrida include *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), *Dissemination* (1972), *The Gift of Death*(1992), *Specters of Marx*(1993), *Glas*(1974), *Acts of Literature* (1992), *Politics of Friendship* (1994) and *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*(2001).His works have been a part of the syllabus of many universities across the world. Jacques Derrida died of pancreatic cancer on October 2004 at the age of 74.

SAQ:

Q.1. What were some of the major works of Jacques Derrida?

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5.4 KEY CONCEPTS OF JACQUES DERRIDA

In this section we will discuss and analyze some of the major ideas and school of thoughts associated with Jacques Derrida.

5.4.1 Deconstruction:

Deconstruction is a form of literary and philosophical analysis that questions the fundamental structures of oppositions that exists in western philosophical discourse. Although the term itself has been in use previously, it is Jacques Derrida who had popularized the term. This term first appeared in his early works of the 1960s. Derrida initially utilized this practice as a response to the normative structuralist beliefs of thinkers like Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi Strauss. Saussure proposed that language is an amalgamation of various signs and that each sign is made up of a signifier(the physical sound) and the signified(the psychological concept). Derrida used the strategy of deconstruction to dismantle this structure of signifier and signified by concluding that each signifier leads to more signifiers, which leads to even more signifiers and so on. In this endless process of meaning making the eternal truth or the ultimate signified is perpetually lost. On the other hand, Derrida argued that western philosophical theory relies upon the construct of binary oppositions. These binary oppositions lead to the formation of hierarchies between the binary, in which,

one half is asserted to be superior than the other, or the other half is established as devoid of their superior half and therefore are inferior. Such binaries function in one's daily lives such as day and night, good and evil, male and female, colonials and natives, human and nature, white and black, protagonist and antagonist. Deconstruction is an attempt of breaking down all such binary structures. It does not merely inverse the hierarchies within the binary but, rather, disrupts the foundation of any binary itself ultimately leading to chaos. As Derrida said, "Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning or displacing a conceptual order. (*Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida)". For instance, the patriarchal structure of Man/Woman can be deconstructed not by reversing the power imbalance and positioning Woman as superior to Man, but rather by dismantling the construct of such gender roles itself which will lead to the acceptance of a third space, the queer space.

Deconstruction has been primarily used as a strategy of literary analysis. Western traditions of literary criticism asserted on a definitive priority to either the form or the content of the text. This tussle between form and content is superseded with the belief that any text has an inherent meaning that is literal and an implied meaning. The author, who is an authoritative figure over the text, imposes the meaning to any text. Derrida argues against this notion of a fixed meaning of a text, either through its form or its content. Deconstruction is a form of literary analysis in which the meanings of the text is constantly shifting and therefore not fixed. Derrida says that a literary text does not have an inherent meaning. It is the readers who derive meaning from the text. As such, there are as

many interpretations of a text as there are readers. Practitioners of deconstruction celebrate the text's ability to self-destruct, the inevitable deferral of the meaning making process. Accordingly, a text is a never ending free play of language that does not have one final meaning, but instead is suspended amidst indefinite number of meanings. The construct of the text itself is questioned through the strategy of deconstruction. Derrida famously said, 'There is no outside text'.

5.4.2. Différance:

Jacques Derrida coined the term 'différance' to refer to the arbitrary meaning making process of language. The word 'différance', according to Derrida, is infused with the meaning of the term 'différence'(with an 'e'), which is 'to differ from itself' as well as the Latin verb 'differe' which is 'the action of putting off' – deferring. Thus, Derridian understanding of the term 'différance' (with an 'a') includes both the distinction of the meaning of any term from itself and the delay of the meaning as well. To elucidate, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure proposed that language is made up of signs which consist of the signifier and the signified. Practitioners of any language are able to differentiate between one sign and the other by referring to the physical sound of the sign. For instance, the sign 'cut' is different from the sign 'pen' because of the difference of their sounds. The auditory differences lead to the understanding of different meanings for each sign. The process of signification, or meaning making, thus, rely on differences. Derrida builds upon Saussure's concept of difference in signs. He argues that along with the difference of sound, each sign also leads to the deferral of meaning, which he broadly terms, 'différance'. The word 'différance', therefore, constitutes two words 'difference' and 'deferral'. Différance implies to simultaneously differ and defer.

Derrida argues that one sign leads to an infinite series of signifiers. In this process, the 'true' meaning of the sign or the transcendental signified is constantly deferred. This deferral or postponement of the 'true' meaning ultimately suspends language itself in a process of 'in-betweens'. The meaning, thus, lies not in the ultimate signified, but in the *différance*.

To exemplify, let us consider the sign 'Pen'. The sign 'pen' can be defined as 'a device that is used for writing or drawing on a page'. The signifiers of the sign pen are, thus, themselves are signs like 'device', 'write', 'draw', 'page'. These signifiers are different from each other in both their sound as well as their meaning. Further, these signifiers like 'device' or 'write' lead to another group of signifiers as well. Thus, to explain the meaning of the term 'pen', one has to explain the meaning of the terms 'device', 'write' and 'page'. To explain the meaning of these terms further, one has to consider some other signifiers. The question 'What is a pen?' leads to the question 'What is a device?' which leads to the question 'What is an object?' which leads to an infinite series of questions and answers. Thus, the fixed ultimate 'truth' is but never achieved in this process of signification. There is instead a perpetual postponement or delay of meaning. This is *différance* in which the eternal signified is constantly pushed farther back. Derrida therefore states that the meaning of language are infinite and not fixed. The meaning lies in the space between the signifiers.

Stop to Consider:

Deconstruction is a form of philosophical and literary practice in which the constructs of established structures are systematically dismantled. This practice rejects the pre-established binary structures of society wherein a hierarchy is asserted of one over the other like Man/Woman, Good/Evil, Day/Night, White/Black

etcetera. The practitioners of deconstruction proposes that there are no inherent meaning of any text. Each reader imposes their own interpretation to the text, thereby leading to a possibility of infinite meanings and interpretations.

Différance is a termed coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to explain the arbitrariness of language. The term ‘différance’ consists of the phrases ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’. The meaning of any sign within a language system is established through its difference of sound from other signs. Derrida argues that along with difference, there is a constant deferral of the meaning of signs. Each sign leads to a group of signifiers which then leads to more signifiers, which leads to even more signifiers. The meaning can, therefore, only be delayed but never truly achieved. Due to *différance*, the meaning making becomes an impossibility.

5.5 DERRIDA’S TAKE ON POST STRUCTURALISM

Western philosophical discourses have often relied upon the structural formations that function as proponents of discourses. These structures are constantly reformed, readjusted and imposed through these variously discursive discussions. In this process of continuous reimaginings of these structures the centers that keep the structure intact often shift the ‘play’ of signification. Yet the construct of the structure itself is never questioned, only its value transferred. Jacques Derrida states that Western philosophers have been constantly engaging with the discussions regarding the composition of such social structures, without analyzing the construct of it. Such discourses regarding the various compositions, hierarchies or binaries of the structure ultimately solidify the structure itself as a ‘naturally existing phenomenon’ instead of being a man made construct. Hence, Derrida says, ‘the structurality of

structures had to begin to be thought' , critiquing the classical discourses of humanism and empiricism.

5.5.1. The Center and the Periphery

Derrida particularly engages in the deconstruction of one such structure, that is, the center and the periphery. He challenged the structuralist idea of the center being an intrinsic part of any structure as it marks the fixity of its origin and the periphery being outside the center's formation. The center is, instead an organizing force that regulates as well as limits the periphery. The center, according to the classical thinking, secures and balances the structure itself. Yet the center apparently remains unaffected by the movements in the periphery. That is so because the center is a limiting force that inhibits the 'free play' of action. Derrida disregards the center as being a fixed, eternal presence which can be believed to be the 'eternal' truth or 'transcendental signified '. That is so because according to him, the center is both ' inside and outside ' the structure. It remains inside a structure to stabilize the structure and yet it does not participate within the structure, therefore being on the outside. Further, the center itself is constantly shifting with time, place and culture, thus raising questions against the validity of the structure itself. 'Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation of the transformation of elements is forbidden'(Derrida). There lies the paradox of the center being simultaneously the creator of the free play which forms the structure and the destroyer of it.

To understand Derrida's attempt at destabilizing the Center/Periphery binary, consider the example of God as the center

of all religious discourses. Every major religion believes that there is a Creator of the universe and all living creatures. The Creator governs the human life as our creator. All living creatures are presumed to be a part of the cosmos, that is, God. Thus, the center, God resides within the structure of any religious discourse. This center creates, governs, and informs the fundamentals of the religion itself. Yet, God, who is present amidst all their creation, is virtually absent from the play of human life. Further, God remains unaffected by the play of life. Thus, the center, God, simultaneously remains both inside and outside the structure of religion. Similarly, in the phallogentric patriarchal structure of the society, the position of a woman is constantly defined in relation to the Man. The man, who has the phallus, thus, becomes the center of this structure. The presence of the phallus gives structurality to the patriarchal system, while subsequently limiting the free play of the other. In this binary, women are either defined as negatives of the phallus, similar to the phallus or a complementary to the phallus. However, this central position of the phallus has come under scrutiny in terms of its functionality. The presence of the third identity, the Queer, Intersex identity, destabilizes the phallic presence. Derrida redefines the term 'woman' as a concept, rather than an identity. Although, deconstruction, according to Derrida is not a part of the feminist theory, it 'naturally supposes a radical deconstruction of phallogentric'. Deconstructive practice not merely reverses the binary, but instead decenters the notion of binary itself. Derrida states that deconstruction begins with the 'rupture' in the preordained structures. This 'rupture' of the center is an 'event' which overthrows structurality itself.

Stop to Consider:

Derrida argues the most of Western classical philosophy relied upon the binary construction of societal structures. These structures contain a center. The center is the origin of the structure formed around it. This center governs the margins but does not directly participate within structure. Therefore, Derrida claims that the center is both inside and outside the structure. This double existence disproves the validity of the structure itself. According to Derrida, clear demarcation between the center and periphery does not exist.

5.5.2 The Rupture and the Event

In his famous speech, 'Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences', Derrida creates such a self proclaimed 'event' which ruptures the pre-established structures. The conference at John Hopkins University was centered at commemorating the achievements of Claude Levi Strauss. However, Derrida claims to have ruptured this center as he systematically deconstructed Strauss' Structuralism. This rupture was an event that led to the beginning of a new center. Derrida understands this event as not the new beginning of a novel structure, but rather as the redoubling of the previous one, which further dismantles the structuralist view of the center as the original and not a duplicitous locus. 'This event I called a rupture, the disruption I alluded to at the beginning of this paper, presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought', that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this disruption was repetition in every sense of the word.(Derrida)'. Furthermore, Derrida claims that western philosophical discourses have been limited to the analysis of the history of events as they occur rather than the causality of them. Western philosophy has concentrated upon the chronology of the

events, thereby grappling with the question of ‘What comes after this event?’ ‘Derrida states that a shift of focus is required. ‘What causes the events?’, ‘Why did this event occur?’, ‘Why does the center keeps relocating?’, these are questions that Derrida demands to be focused on instead. The linearity, thus questioned, leads to the existence of all such events in the same vicinity. Derrida elucidates that all events originate in language. Language itself is not a linear, chronological order. Thus, language holds all discourses simultaneously and it is the structuralist philosophy that insists in the homogeneous sequencing of the chaos. Derrida urges that rather than organizing the discourses which then turn to events in a definitive order, the disorder must be celebrated. In this sense, Derrida presents a view similar to the view inside the Aleph’ in Gorge Luis Borges’ story of ‘The Aleph’. Derridian termination of the Aleph is ‘Aporia’ which he describes as ‘blind spots’ in the metaphysical discourses that creates a state of uncertainty or paralysis, a state where all possibilities exists simultaneously.

SAQ:

Q. Think of some examples of some transcendental concepts that societies claim are institutional structures. Where does their center lie? Can the center of such structures be displaced? If so, how?

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5.6 DERRIDA’S TAKE ON LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND WRITING

Jacques Derrida claims that much of Western philosophy originates from the discourses present in language. Language is a tool that

holds all possible discourse. It is also a tool that propagates one discourse over the other. This preference of one over the other is entirely arbitrary. Thus, it is language that initiates the discursivity of society. 'This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse...' (Derrida). However, the initiator of all discourses, language, itself is without a definite structure. The arbitrary structure of a language system in the form of sign, signifier and signified, have been deconstructed minutely by Derrida. Hence, if language itself is meaningless and arbitrary, then all other structures and discourses too are just as meaningless.

5.6.1 Speech and Writing

To illustrate his argument regarding the lack of structurality of language, Derrida often refers to the discourse of speech and writing. Western philosophy had historically considered Speech as superior to Writing. Speech is accepted as the purest form of language, whereas, writing is rejected as a false imitation of speech that corrupts language itself. Such ideas originate from the fundamentals of philosophy laid down by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Western philosophy has traced a lineage of almost direct correlation from the ideas proposed by Rousseau. Derrida, in his book *Of Grammatology* focused keenly on dismantling one such fundamentals that dates back to Rousseau. Rousseau proposed for a society that is the closest to nature. The 'natural' order of things, according to him, is in direct opposition to culture. Nature, in Rousseau's understanding, is in itself a perfect state that does not require any modification. But, what does Rousseau consider as a polluting force to the pristine Nature?. Rousseau argued that all arts, culture and scientific thinking are pollutants to Nature, components that disfigure the 'natural' order of things.'... our souls have been

corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our sciences and arts towards perfection'(Rousseau). In this argument, Rousseau had proposed writing to be one such pollutant that has corrupted the natural order, that is, speech. Speech, Rousseau believes, is capable of communicating one's thought and ideas perfectly. It is, in itself, a complete medium of communication that requires no tool other than the human voice. Speech is able to communicate one's thoughts instantly, without preparation. It is also able to generate and instantaneous response from the listener. In the medium of speech, one is able to distinguish various emotions that govern the thought. Thus, this medium of communication is self sufficient. On the other hand, Rousseau claims that the dependence on writing has corrupted the already perfect medium of speech. Writing does not generate and instantaneous response from the person who is on the receiving end of the message. Writing, therefore, is distant, unconnected and unnatural. Writing is a form of communication that exists in the past or future, but never entirely in the present. The fixity of writing has instead restricted the liberty of speech. Thus, Rousseau's idea of speech as the superior, present and 'natural' mode of communication and writing as the inferior, absent and unnatural mode of communication has trickled down through the history of philosophy as its guiding principle. Derrida disagrees with this binary of speech and writing. He challenges Rousseau's claim of speech as a self sufficient mode of communication. He states that there is a paradox in Rousseau's own argument as he too had written his philosophy to communicate it. Thus, Derrida claims that Rousseau's own act of writing proves that speech, in itself, is not self sufficient. In fact, the emergence of writing as a medium of communication is due to a certain insufficiency in the medium of speech of transcending the constraints of time and space. If speech was self sufficient in its

natural form, why did writing emerge at all? This proves that there is a lack that was needed to be fulfilled. Further, if self sufficiency is the deciding factor of the 'naturalness' of society, then simply the existence of arts, culture and sciences disproves the superiority of speech over writing.

Stop to Consider:

Western philosophy has historically considered speech as superior to writing. Speech is considered to be a present, responsive and natural form of communication. Whereas, writing is considered to be an absent, irresponsive and unnatural form of communication. Derrida overturns this hierarchy by arguing that writing came into existence because there was a lack in the medium of speech. Writing fulfills that lack, thereby making full communication possible. Writing also helps with the problem of memory. Thus, speech and writing coexist to complete communication.

5.6.2 Pharmakon

Derrida, further argues that the binary of speech and writing emerged as a misinterpretation of the Platonian idea of 'pharmakon'. Western philosophers like Rousseau have derived their hierarchical binary between speech and writing from Plato's description of writing as 'pharmakon'. In his *Phaedrus*, Plato engages in a dialogic presentation of speech and writing. Socrates, in this text, walks to the countryside with Phaedrus, who carries a copy of a speech on love by Lydia's. Throughout their conversation Phaedrus recites various verses from the copy of the speech. Socrates gets angry at Phaedrus for not engaging in a direct conversation and only reiterating what has been already written, and therefore fixed. In this

oscillation between Socrates and Phaedrus, dialogue fails and so does the conversation. Derrida claims that there has been numerous misinterpretations of this story, all seemingly concluding that writing, because of its failure of engaging in a dialogue, is inferior to speech. Plato uses the term 'pharmakon' for writing, which has been accepted as something that is poisonous. The Greek word pharmakon actually refers to a substance that is both a cure and a poison. Thus, pharmakon presents a duality of both a positive and negative connotation. For example, a drug might be a poison to some and also a medicinal cure to others. In his *Plato's Pharmacy*, Derrida dismantles the Plato's logo centric view of speech being the only mode of communication that holds logos(truth or logic).

For Plato, speech held logos as it was responsive and present. Writing, on the other hand, was a one sided act of communication which does not allow for the possibility of dialogue. This logo centric view essential reduces writing as a copy or an echo of speech. It positions speech as an act that is nearer to reality. Speech is also certain and precise. Derrida argues that such distinctions between speech and writing cannot be made as both speech and writing depend on the use of words. Words have multiple meanings and can generate confusions. All the limitations of writing are also the limitations of speech. Writing is accused of being multifaceted. One is not able to derive the true emotions of the author just by reading what is written. There are chances of misinterpretations and therefore miscommunications. However, this multiplicity is also present in speech. Without a round of clarification, even spoken words can be misinterpreted and miscommunicated. For instance, the word pharmakon is explained as a remedy by some while also being interpreted as poison. For Derrida, writing is also a Pharmakon as it produces multiple contradictory outcomes.

In response to the debate of speech and writing, Derrida proposes the a new form called Arche-writing. Arche-writing is, by its definition, anti-logocentric. Derrida celebrates the probability of words having no fixed logos (truth or logic). This liberates the word itself from the duty of adhering to one specific meaning or signifier. Instead, each word is capable of producing infinite possibilities. Arche-writing, therefore exists outside the binary of speech and writing. Some might say that it even precedes this binary. The meaning making in this free play of words are derived from the various ‘traces’ that lie between all the signifiers. This makes the meaning making process a highly contextual and local task. In Derridian worldview, words produce different meanings, each depending on the context and circumstances.

SAQ:

Q. What are the differential views regarding speech and writing in Western philosophy? How does Ferdinand de Saussure’s ideology compare to Plato’s proposition of the logos?

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5.7 RECEPTION OF DERRIDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Jacques Derrida has become a household name in the fields of academia and philosophy. His infamous 1966 speech has indeed become a compulsory part of many university syllabuses across the globe. This speech is often regarded as the moment when Post Structuralism decided to announce its presence to the world. Derrida’s radical theories had created an uproar in the conservative

ideological discourse and allowed for a debate that would shape the world's Post Modern thinking. Deconstruction, as a strategy for literary analysis has been taken up by practitioners of various subversive theories like feminism and post colonialism. These theorists decided to practice deconstruction to dismember seminal texts to highlight the injustices, that were otherwise overlooked.

Yet the reception of Derrida's philosophy had not been without criticism. One such criticism against his work has been about his complete dismissal of structures. This has earned him the accusation of being anti-establishmentarian. When the world was engaged in an ideological warfare, Derrida chose to question the existence of ideology itself. That is why, his stance proved to be 'apolitical' despite his active engagement with political and ethnical discourses. Derrida's experimental style of writing, his sporadic and complicated prose, and his relentless focus on text also earned him the criticism of being a nihilist. Although, 21st century critics and theorists seem to have accepted Derrida's lack of structurality in his style of writing, which only strengthens his philosophy. On the other hand, his philosophy seem to also threaten the workings of certain identity based theories like feminism and Marxism. They have expressed their apprehension of Derrida's deconstruction being used by the conservatives as an antithesis to the progressive work done so far in their field. Derrida's interdisciplinary approach also falls under scrutiny of academicians of both the fields of literature and philosophy. However, as the importance of interdisciplinary studies have risen over the past decades, the field of academia has praised Derrida for being ahead of the time. Jacques Derrida has inspired countless research, conferences, lectures and literary analysis over

time. His name has become an unforgettable part of today's philosophical and literary arena.

5.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you have learnt about one of the most imminent theorists in the fields of philosophy and literature, Jacques Derrida. Derrida's innovation had led to a large scale movement of academia towards a neutral non-hierarchical practice of literary analysis. You have had a brief overview of his prominent concept of deconstruction. Deconstruction, as you have learnt, is a strategy of dismantling and decentering previously established hierarchical structures in society as well as in literature. Derrida's primary focus of deconstruction has been on language and culture. As such, you came to know about some of his major arguments regarding the structuralist understanding of the sign, signifier and signified. Derrida's minute deconstruction of the sign was led by his strategy of Différance. Derrida describes différance as the perpetual deferral or delay of the transcendental signified, or the ultimate truth. Further, according to Derridian philosophy language is arbitrary and meaningless as it does not hold the any eternal truth. In a similar vein, you have also learnt about his deconstruction of binaries such as speech and writing, center and periphery and event and history. Derrida dismantles the binary of speech and writing by advocating for the concept of arche-writing which celebrates the lack of logos in words. Further, he also points out the paradox of the center/periphery binary, that is the dual existence of the center in the inside and the outside of the structure. You can now recognize the significance of Jacques Derrida as now of the pioneering contributors to modern literary theory.

5.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What is deconstruction? How does Derrida conduct literary analysis of a text?
2. 'Derrida systematically dismantles Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the sign as the base of a linguistic structure'. Comment.
3. Explain Derrida's major criticisms towards the Western philosophical tradition.
4. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida mentions that Western philosophy is based on prioritizing speech over writing. How does Derrida deconstruct this binary structure.
5. Critically explain the notion of Différance in the light of Derrida's critique of Saussure's linguistic theory.

5.10 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT – 6

JACQUES DERRIDA: STRUCTURE, SIGN AND PLAY IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 A Brief Introduction to The Critic
- 6.4 Reading The Text
- 6.5 The Debate Between Nature and Culture
- 6.6 The Debate between Bricoleur and Engineer
- 6.7 Reception of the Text
- 6.8 Summing Up
- 6.9 Modal Questions
- 6.10 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will read through one of the seminal text of Post Structuralism written by Jacques Derrida, ‘Structure , sign and play in the discourse of human sciences’ and understand the various arguments that were asserted throughout the text. You will also get a brief overview of various social, philosophical and political contexts that had influenced and informed Derrida’s school of thought. You will learn about Derrida’s responses to the popular theories that were prevalent at the time. Aftergoing through this unit, you will be able to

- *explain* Derrida’s criticism of the structuralist discourse on language;

- *analyze* the various social constructs that are prevalent in the society;
- *understand* the binaries that govern language, anthropology and philosophy;
- *learn* how to deconstruct a text or a discourse.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Jacques Derrida was one of the pioneering advocates of Post Structuralism and the deconstructive theory. This school of thought emerged as a response to the structuralist criticism of the early 20th century. In response to the asserted rigid binary structures, Derrida gave his speech called, ‘Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human Sciences’ at the John Hopkins University in the year 1966. In his speech he systematically dismantled the basis of structures that are kept secured within the discourse of language, culture and philosophy. This speech will set forth a reverberating effect in the fields of philosophy, literature and various other fields of academia. Newer ‘Post Modernist’ thoughts and ideas used Derrida’s text to accelerate the reception of such novel concept.

6.3 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIC

Jacques Derrida is one of the most prominent philosopher and literary critic of the twentieth century. He was born on 15th July 1930 in the French occupied Algeria. Born to Jewish parents, Derrida experienced a tumultuous childhood and teen years amidst the rise of anti-Semitism. He had witnessed the rising Algerian nationalism and the discriminatory treatment of the natives by the French colonizers. Political and social tensions between various communities had shaped his later political and philosophical

outlooks. Derrida's philosophy focused on a systematic dismantling of the rigid social and political structures.

Jacques Derrida made his first impact upon the arena of philosophy and literature in the year 1966, when he presented his ideas of deconstruction and post structuralism in the international conference in John Hopkins University. His philosophical approach was extensively centered, or rather, decentered on the questioning of rigid social structures that previous structuralist philosophers seem to uphold. Derrida proposed that there is no inherent truth or 'transcendental signified' in the existence of structures that govern one's life. According to Derridian philosophy, all discourses, structures, and norms are human construct and thus can be deconstructed, questioned and nullified. Derrida primarily focused on the binaries that seem to govern western philosophy, like Man/Woman, Day/Night, Us/Them, Colonizers/Natives etcetera. Derrida's vehement refusal of accepted structures makes him a post structuralist philosopher and thinker.

In his lifetime, Jacques Derrida published multiple books, essays, and articles discussing his philosophical and theoretical concerns in great details. He extensively discussed his theories regarding language and its various functionalities. Derrida's take on language highlights that language construction and the act of meaning making of language is arbitrary and meaningless. He stated that since language itself is without any eternal truth, all discourses which function within the language are also abstract constructs and therefore does not have any rigid truth to it. Derrida explained his disregard of the fixities of discourses and instead promotes free play of theories, philosophies and discourses, wherein no one theory would be considered better than the others. His works had a considerable impact on the consumption and production of

philosophy, theory and literature hereafter. They led to, what would later be known as, post modernism in literature.

His most notable works were published in the year 1967. This year has been regarded as a milestone in his career when he published three of his seminal books called *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena* and *Writing and Difference*. These works were concerned with the workings of western philosophical and literary traditions. These publications soon cemented Jacques Derrida as one of the most impactful theorist and literary critic of the twentieth century. Some of his other publications include *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), *Dissemination* (1972), *The Gift of Death*(1992), *Specters of Marx*(1993), *Glas*(1974), *Acts of Literature* (1992), *Politics of Friendship* (1994) and *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*(2001). Derrida's works have been a part of the syllabi of major universities across the world and has been an essential part of the philosophical discussion shaping the worldview of the twenty-first century.

Derrida has a long eccentric life. Throughout his lifetime he had been subjected to both praise and criticism from various communities. While modern thinkers praised his work for its novelty, other groups considered his disregard of structures as a threat to their existing political and social views. Even others used his theories to explain their resistance to certain social structures such as gender and sexuality. Derrida, therefore, continues to influence the workings of post modern philosophy, politics and literature. After a long active engagement with theory, Derrida fell ill with pancreatic cancer. He passed away in the year 2004 leaving a permanent mark in the field of philosophy and literature.

Check Your Progress:

Q. What are the most notable works of Jacques Derrida?

Q. On what grounds did Derrida criticize the fundamentals of structuralism?

6.4 READING THE TEXT

In the year 1966, Jacques Derrida contributed a paper to a conference entitled ‘The Language of Criticism and The Sciences of Man’, held at Johns Hopkins University called ‘Structure Sign and Play in The Discourse of The Human Sciences’. This paper was a challenge to the new age ideas and methodologies in the fields of humanities generated by European structuralism. Derrida’s paper, which was later published, became an origin of a series of deconstruction of the previously constructed ideas and beliefs, what Derrida had called to be a ‘rupture’ or an ‘event’.

6.4.1 The question of the ‘event’

Jacques Derrida begins this text by quoting Montaigne ‘We need to interpret the interpretations more than to interpret things’. The text, according to Derrida, is in itself an event which would later form a structurality around itself. Derrida claims that similar structures have been at work throughout various discussions of philosophy and theory in Western science and philosophy. In fact, the critic says that Western philosophy has been entirely dependent on the structures that it analyses. The previous philosophers have scrutinized these structures, analyzed their composition and even reinforced them. However, until this ‘event’ no one has questioned the ‘structurality of the structures’. That is, the center of any structure, which is the point of its origin, has not been thoroughly questioned. Derrida claims that all societal and metaphysical structures and fixated by

such a center. This center is located at the point where a rupture occurs in the previous structure and creates a new dent. This is the event from where a new structure originates. 'The function of this center was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure, but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of this structure would limit what we might call the play of signification (Derrida)'. Derrida stated that the event which initiated the formation and free play of the structures around it becomes, paradoxically, its limitation.

The center, which is the original 'rupture', permits and initiates the play within the structure that it forms. However, this play of composition is not unlimited. It is the center which provides boundaries and prohibits the play from escaping the structurality. As such, the center acts as a governing body of the structure. It is the basis of the structure. But it is not a part of the play of signification. Center remains unaffected by the play of structurality that happens around it. This, it is both inside the structure, governing the structure from within, and outside it. Derrida claims that the center can 'indifferently be called the origin or the end'. Once the play of structurality affects the center itself, a rupture will occur at the center, and the event of a new structure will be formed. This, Derrida claims is the 'history' of structurality. The structures that have been at play in the society are a depiction of the successive history where one structure substitutes the other. Thus, the center keeps getting decentered to a new locus, the history of which can be traced back to the original event. 'Successively and in regulated fashion, the center receives different forms and names (Derrida)'.

Derrida stated that his speech questioning the structurality of structures itself is an event for the formation another belief system. Therefore, his speech became the center which replaces the centers of other structures which the speech questions. Thus, this center is a

redoubling or a duplication of the center of previous structure, albeit with a new thought, form and system. Derrida then claims that if all such structures and centers are mere duplication or relocation of the previous, then there is no fixed locus or center. It is instead an absence of fixity, which can be replaced or altered. 'Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center (Derrida)'. The center is a sort of non presence, in which infinite possibilities co-exist. The absence of the center also signifies the disruption of all the previously established societal notions. As such, everything becomes a discourse. Since all discourses are sustained within language system, language too is problematized by Derrida in his speech.

Derrida explains his deconstruction of the existing Structuralism of centers through several examples. He states that the history of metaphysics has coexisted along with the history of the destruction of the said metaphysics. The previously established central structures have been replaced by newer theories and philosophies, thus, proving that there is no 'eternal' truth or 'transcendental' signified. As an example, Derrida sites Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysical concept of being and truth, Freud's deconstruction of the concept of a unified self by breaking down the self into conscious, unconscious and subconscious, and Heidegger's destruction of onto-theology and of the determination of being as presence. Derrida states that these thinkers have challenged previously accepted structures and created a rupture which led to formation of newer events.

Stop to Consider:

Western metaphysics have been fixated on the presence of the center of societal structures. Derrida claims that these structures are

initiated because of a rupture in the previous structure. This rupture is an event, which leads to the formation of new structures. The center, or the event, of any structure allows the free play of the structurality. However, the center also limits this free play from destroying the structure itself. Thus, the center both initiates the structure and limits it. Whenever the free play extends beyond the limits of a given structure, a rupture occurs and a new structure is formed. Thus, the center is constantly shifted from one structure to the next. Derrida states Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger as examples of this relocation of previous structures.

6.4.2 The question of the ‘sign’

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure had laid down the fundamentals of a language system in his seminal book *Course In General Linguistics*. Saussure maintains that a language system is not merely the process of naming the objects. It is instead a combination of the words with certain psychological concepts. In any language system, the objects and concepts around us are asserted with certain sounds that determine that object or concept. Saussure has stated that language systems are based on the combination of a psychological concept to a physical sound. This combination leads to the formation of a sign. For instance, the sign ‘Tree’ is determined by the physical sound that the word ‘tree’ creates and the concept that the mind conjures upon hearing the sound. Saussure names the physical sound ‘signifier’ and the psychological concept ‘signified’. This combination of the signifier to its signified leads to the sign. The association of the signifier to the corresponding signified is, nevertheless, arbitrary. The signifiers came to be associated with their corresponding signified at random.

Saussure further claims that in a linguistic structure the differentiation of one sign from the other is dependent upon the differences in their physical sound. For instance, we know that a 'pen' is different from a 'book' because of the difference in their sounds. Thus, difference is a significant aspect of a linguistic sign. Further, this difference allows the play of signification. The play of signification can be understood as the process of defining one sign with the help of their signifiers. If a sign is the object or the concept, then the signifiers are the synonymous signs which define the object or the concept and the signified is the ultimate meaning of the sign. In this system, the signifiers of the sign is supposed to lead to the signified, that is, the ultimate eternal meaning of the sign.

Derrida critically challenges this system of the linguistic sign in this text. He claims that the structure of the sign does not lead to the final meaning of the sign. Instead, there is *différance* at play constantly. The meaning making of the linguistic sign is a never ending process which leads to a perpetual deferral of the meaning. The structurality of the language system is in question in this text. The concept of *différance*, as proposed by Derrida, deconstructs the notion of the sign itself as it proves that there is no signified at all. There are only infinite signifiers which lead to one another in vicious circles and the signified, the ultimate meaning, is always lost. 'If one erases the radical difference signifier and signified, it is the word signifier itself which must be abandoned as a metaphysical concept (Derrida)'.

The structurality of the sign, signifier and signified, according to Derrida, is therefore, based on a system of opposition. The identity of the sign is defined by what it is not. The constant deferral of meaning making within a language system proves that the play of signification is also a play of supplementation, in which one signifier supplements or replaces the other and the process goes on

endlessly. Derrida states that since all discourses are suspended within the language systems and language systems themselves are without any definite meaning, transcendental signified, discourses too are without any ultimate truth. The structurality of any discourse is, hence, questioned. Furthermore, like language, discourses too rely on the factor of opposition to define itself.

The system of opposition, or rather, the decentering of the center, is especially apparent in ethnology. Derrida states that ethnology as a field of social science emerged due to a dislocation of the European culture as a point of reference. The Eurocentric worldview came into question, that is, decentered, and its implications had been felt in fields of politics, economy and philosophy. The decentering therefore removes Eurocentric philosophy as the transcendental signifier and ultimately allows for a cosmopolitan worldview with contradictory cultures to co-exist. Derrida states that the deconstruction of the system of language leads to the free play of all structures and ultimately allows for a post structuralist worldview.

Stop to Consider:

The term 'différance' is used to explain the deconstruction of the language systems. 'Différance' constitutes two words 'difference' and 'deferral'. Therefore, 'différance' means simultaneously 'to differ' and 'to defer'. Derrida states that the Saussurian concept of the sign relies upon the difference of sounds of one sign and the other. Due to this difference of sounds one is able to differentiate between words and tell one word apart from the other. However, in addition to the difference of sounds, Derrida claims that there is an instantaneous deferral in the process of meaning making. Since one sign leads to an infinite series of signifiers, the ultimate meaning is never achieved. Rather, the process of meaning making leads to a

constant postponement of the meaning itself. The meaning is constantly delayed.

6.5 THE DEBATE BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE

In his systematic deconstruction of established structures, Derrida challenges the Western philosophical tradition of relying upon hierarchical binaries to formulate the structures. Derrida particularly focuses on one such structuralist thinker and philosopher, Claude Lévi Strauss. Levi Strauss is one of the most prominent structuralist philosophers of the twentieth century. His works weigh heavily on the theoretical and philosophical field and have inspired many other thinkers as well. Levi Strauss' structuralist philosophy govern the doctrines of twentieth century philosophy.

Strauss' focus on the binary opposition between the components of a given structure has been challenged by Derrida in this text. Derrida primarily focuses on the binary between nature and culture to prove his deconstruction of their structurality. The opposition between nature and culture has experienced several renditions from time immemorial in Western philosophy. Derrida states that philosophers and thinkers from times as early as fifth century have been grappling with this binary. These renditions manifest themselves in the association of nature as opposed 'to law, to education, to art, to technics – but to liberty, to the arbitrary, to history, to society, to the mind and so on (Derrida)'.

Lévi Strauss, in his book *Elementary Structures of Kinship* pens down rigid and distinct definitions of nature and culture. He states that all that is universal and spontaneous, not dependent on any norms and are not bound by rules and regulations falls into the category of nature. The natural is applicable to all, regardless of

culture, ethnicity, and community. On the other hand, all that are dependent upon a system of norms or rules and regulations and varies according to the composition of each type of society falls into the category of culture. The cultural varies according to the time period, history and geography of a certain community. Thus, Strauss sets nature and culture as binary opposite to one another. By these definitions, the natural is the antithesis of the cultural.

Derrida dismantles this binary of nature and culture by citing the example of incest prohibition. The act of incest prohibition has been labelled as a 'scandal' by Levi Strauss in his book *Elementary Structures*. Derrida ruminates on this scandal. The act of incest prohibition does not abide by the strict opposition between the nature/culture binary. That is because, this prohibition is both natural and cultural. It is natural because this prohibition has been placed by virtually all cultures and society across the globe, making it a universally applicable matter. It is cultural because the prohibition, by definition, is an imposition of a rule, a norm, that everybody in the society must abide by. The sustainability of the culture depends on the prohibition of incest. 'Incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural (Derrida)'. Thus, within the binary structure, there exists something that is neither one or the other, or simultaneously both.

Levi Strauss affirms incest prohibition as the only scandal or the exception to the otherwise perfectly applicable classical binary. However, Derrida disregards this idea of a scandal within the structure as a mere exception. Instead, Derrida claims that the act of incest prohibition proves the possibility of existence beyond the binaries of nature/culture. This act escapes the parameters constructed by theorists. It also deconstructs the structurality of the

binary as a philosophical concept. This example of incest prohibition, thus, proves the fragility of all other similar structures. Derrida uses this example as a 'first step' towards questioning the philosophical structures that have been otherwise taken for granted. This questioning of all structure may lead to a vehement disregard of philosophy in general, rather than critically engaging with it. That is to say, it may lead to a 'step outside,' philosophy in which philosophy itself would be considered unimportant.

However, Derrida insists upon another approach. Rather than disengaging from philosophy itself, Derrida urges the theorists to consider these philosophical structures as empirical discoveries and use them as tools to understand and critically engage with philosophy. These structures, or tools, should not have any limitations or rigid rules. One must be free to use them, believe in them, or even discard them as and when necessary. Deconstruction is, therefore, the process of accepting that all societal, political, and philosophical structures are human made structures, which are subject to change and evolution.

SAQ:

Q. Does the concept of "nature" exist independently from human interpretation?; What are the implications of viewing humans as inherently part of nature, rather than separate from it?

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6.6. THE DEBATE BETWEEN BRICOLEUR AND ENGINEER

Derrida deconstructs another binary opposition put forward by Levi Strauss in his book *The Savage Mind*. The binary between a Bricoleur and an Engineer guides the structure of Western metaphysical discourse. Levi Strauss maintains that a Bricoleur is someone who uses the 'means at hand' to create a novel concept or an object. The Bricoleur uses whatever instruments they find in their disposition and transforms those instruments as per their necessity. Therefore they do not create something or some concept entirely on their own. Rather, they discover what was already there and look at it from a differential perspective to find differential meanings and summarizations. A Bricoleur also does not hesitate to misinterpret or adapt the resources as per the demand of the situation. Levi Strauss further states that discourses that are suspended in a language are also such bricoleurs using the concepts already there to come to a new conclusion. As such, criticism, particularly literary criticism, also similarly utilizes the resources, theories and texts available to draw unique and novel ideas and conclusions.

On the contrary, Levi Strauss states that there exists another group of creators who does not use the dispositions available to them. Instead, they seem to create the concepts or objects 'out of the blue'. This creation of concepts and objects seemingly out of nothing is associated with an engineer. An engineer, Strauss maintains, is the original creator of all bricolage that is possible. The engineer constructs the totality of language, syntax and lexicon. Engineer is the initial creator who makes possible subsequent forms of bricolage. For example, in materialistic understanding an engineer is the one who might construct the scientific theory, say the laws of motion, and Bricoleur is the one who might use the scientific theory to give it a practical manifestation, say making a vehicle based on

the said laws of motion. Derrida points out the problems of this binary opposition. Derrida states that all engineers utilizes resources available to them to create novel concepts. For instance, Newton's theory of motion did not originate 'out of nothing'. Rather, Newton utilized the scientific discoveries and theories made prior to him to come to the conclusion of the theory of motion. As such, the concept of the engineer itself is a myth, according to Derrida. All engineers are also bricoleurs who uses concepts, resources and instruments available to them to create novel ideas. 'As soon as we cease to believe in such engineer and in a discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs, then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down (Derrida)'.

Stop to Consider:

A Bricoleur utilizes the existing bricolage, or materials available at their disposition to construct structures, concepts or objects, whose meanings may not be finite or rigid. On the other hand, an engineer constructs the totality of a new structure which has a definite and stable center. The engineer is assumed to be the original creator, who allows other Bricoleurs to use the bricolage to construct newer meanings. Derrida states that the concept of the engineer is a myth as the engineers, like the Bricoleur, uses the existing sign lexicon and contexts to create a new concept.

6.6.1 The issue of the myth

Lévi Strauss emphasizes that bricolage is not only an intellectual activity but also a mythopoetic activity. According to the classical philosophical traditions all discourses can be discussed as overarching myths that give way to discourses and discussions. The original myth can, therefore, be understood as the engineer. However, since the concept of the engineer, or the origin, itself is a myth, mythology also is, instead, a part of bricolage. Derrida deconstructs Lévi Strauss' book *The Raw and The Cooked* and states that there is no original myth from which all other myth can be referenced. With a shift in perspective, the reference myth can be altered. As such each myth can be understood as both the reference point to the other myths as well as the derivation from other myths. Thus, in this sense, in the mythological constructs of discourses, there exists no center, or original event.

On the other hand, Derrida claims that 'there is no unity or absolute source of myth'. Each myth is a shadow, or a secondary rendition, of other myths. The primary source of myth is nonexistent. If myths are themselves a secondary source of discourses, then criticism, theorizing and interpretations of myths are tertiary sources, which leads to even further interpretations of the myth. Thus, the philosophical structures of myth are a complex web of discourses each reflecting and leading to one another. This complex web of discourses is self sustained and self informed. Derrida calls this philosophical structure of myth and their origin 'a historical illusion'.

The myths, or the bricolage, are not based upon the empirical knowledge or discoveries. They are instead a redoubling of the philosophies or theories that are already present in the previous

myths. Thus, the Bricoleur, intellectual or mythopoetic, reinvents or rediscovers and reaffirms philosophies and structures. As such, the original myth, the engineer, as proved by Derrida, is in itself a myth which has emerged from some other myth. This vicious loop of myth draws the conclusion that all discourses and structures are based upon the *play* of substitution, where one center, truth or myth, substitutes the previous one.

Check Your Progress:

Q. Explain Derrida's arguments against the possibility of the original myth which is the reference point of all other myths.

6.6.2. The play of substitution

Derrida concludes his text by explicitly focusing on the act of meaning making, which he calls as the play of substitution. This play is the process of replacing, or displacing, one center with the next. Language systems are subject to such play of signification, where one signifier is replaced by another. Derrida claims that the simple fact that one structure replaces another proves that there is a lack, a negative presence, in the previous structure, which demands to be filled, or supplemented, by another center. As such, the play of substitution is also the play of supplementarity. 'One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence – this sign is added as a surplus, as a supplement (Derrida)'.

Derrida refers to Levi Strauss dissection of this play of signification, in which it is asserted that the play is always caught up in tension. The tension exists primarily between the play and history. History has always been associated with the notion of continuity and

chronology. History retells the chronological events and therefore is suspended between two presents. Meanwhile, the play of substitution emphasizes upon the simultaneously existence of all possibilities within the same discursive present. That is to say that if a philosophical concept came later in history, it does not automatically prove that the possibility of the concept did not exist before. On the other hand, play of substitution also has a tense relationship with the idea of presence. The play is the disruption of presence. It is a demonstration of the lack, the negative space, the absence, within a structure which led to the possibility of decentering of the center. ‘,Play is always a play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence (Derrida)’. Thus, the play of substitution, also understood as the play of supplementarity, is simply a practice of Différance.

Check Your Progress:

Q. What does Derrida mean by play of substitution?

Q. Critically examine how the play of substitution is always caught up in tension.

6.7 RECEPTION OF THE TEXT

Jacques Derrida’s text ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of The Human Sciences’ laid down the ground work for his conception of deconstruction and post structuralism that he later pioneered. This text, referred to as a ‘rupture’ by Derrida himself, shook the very foundation of traditional and classical philosophy that was widely accepted in the 1960s. The reception of this text provoked mixed reactions of both enthusiasm and skepticism.

This text was immediately accepted as a celebration of the dismantling of elitist structuralist philosophy that was being practiced in academia. Derrida's challenge to the stability of structures strongly resonated with other thinkers and philosophers whose philosophies aligned with this text. Scholars and thinkers, particularly in the fields of humanities and critical theory, claimed that this text enables a more liberal free play of theory and language and thereby promotes inclusivity of various communities, who were otherwise marginalized because of elitism. Particularly, critics and thinkers engaged with the newly emerging post modernist theories utilized Derrida's text as a way of justifying their disregard of previously asserted hierarchies. This text has been often cited by promoters of queer theory and post colonialism.

While Derrida received praises for his bold refusal of structuralism, some philosophers, thinkers and critics were critical of his deconstructive theory. Structuralist thinkers who were present during the intellectual atmosphere of the 1960s were especially critical of Derrida as his text had posed a challenge to their status quo. For them, Derrida's ideas were radical and disruptive to the very foundation of their works. Lévi Strauss claimed that Derrida had misinterpreted the basic principles of structuralism that he proposed. Although, Derrida's text had been influential in the fields of theory and philosophy, Strauss maintained that this text was actually a misreading of the ideals of structuralism. Another common criticism faced by Derrida after his infamous speech at Johns Hopkins University was that he was a nihilist. His concept of deconstruction was perceived as too anti-establishmentarian. Derrida would continue to defend himself from accusations of nihilism, of being apolitical or even of being apathetic till his last breath. On the other hand, the complexity of Derrida's language invited the criticism of his text being too 'abstract' and hard to read.

Critics often claimed that the text is elusive and relies extensively on theory and therefore is not practically applicable.

Despite drawing an array of diverse reaction from the thinkers and philosophers, Derrida's 'Structure, Sign and Play in The Discourse of The Human Sciences' is one of the most influential theoretical text of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The field of literary theory and criticism had been influenced greatly by this text. His ideas about language, the instability of meaning, deconstruction of a stable structure, had a lasting impact on how a text is interpreted and analyzed. Derrida's text inspired critics to move away from the traditional mode of literary criticism which focused heavily on form, content, authorship and history and adopt a more flexible and nuanced methods of criticism. Even the concept of what constitutes a text began to be challenged. Derrida had sparked a movement towards questioning all established hierarchies, binaries and structures.

SAQ:

Q. Can Derrida's philosophy be used to inform ethical or political action, or does his focus on deconstruction make it inherently impractical for real-world application?

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6.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you have learnt about one of the seminal texts of post structuralism by Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in The Discourse of The Human Sciences'. You have had a brief glimpse

into the life and experiences of Jacques Derrida, which may have inspired his later philosophies. Through a detailed analysis of the text, you have understood some of the key arguments proposed by the author in this text, which include his challenge to the construct of the origin as the center of structures and the dismantling of the structural integrity of language systems as previously understood by structuralist thinkers. Then, you have had a discussion on some of the most prominent concepts of structuralism like the debate between nature and culture as well as the debate between Bricoleur and engineer. You have critically examined the relationship between various myths and ultimately deconstructed the concept of a reference myth. Further, you have learnt to apply the theory of deconstruction in its practical understanding through the play of substitution. Finally, you have analyzed the various reactions and receptions that Jacques Derrida's paper on deconstructive theory provoked.

6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically analyze Derrida's challenge to the structure of the linguistic sign.
2. According to Derrida, how does structuralism view the concept of the center in a structure?
3. What does Derrida mean by "play" and how does it challenge the idea of a stable, centered meaning within a structure?
4. How does Derrida deconstruct the binary between nature and culture?
5. 'According to Jacques Derrida, the concept of the engineer is a myth'. Discuss.
6. How does Derrida use the concept of "différance" to demonstrate the inherent instability and playfulness of language and meaning?

6.10 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Links:

- <https://www.literatureandcriticism.com/structure-sign-and-play/>
- <https://wp.me/p5bE1-JB>
- <https://www.enotes.com/topics/jacques-derrida/questions/key-points-in-jacques-derrida-s-structure-sign-3110411>

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UNIT- 7

HAYDEN WHITE: HISTORICAL TEXT AS LITERARY ARTIFACT

Unit Structure:

- 7.1 Objectives**
- 7.2 Introduction**
- 7.3 Life and Works of Hayden White**
- 7.4 Reading the Essay**
- 7.5 Summing Up**
- 7.6 References and Suggested Reading**

7.1 Objectives

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to

- *familiarize* themselves with the life and work of Hayden White;
- *evaluate* White's contribution to literary theory;
- *find* out the basic arguments in the essay;
- *write* about the distinctiveness of White's position with regard to the literary /narrative character of historical text.

7.2 Introduction

In this unit, we will engage with the idea of history. In the unit on 'New Historicism' we have discussed the reciprocal relationship between literary text and history. One of the founding insights of new historicism, however, came from Hayden White. Our (uncritical) commonsense accepts the category of 'history' as what

really happened in the past. We distinguish between history and myth, or between history and literature. We might differ on how we make the distinction, but we usually don't differ in the assumption that there *is* a distinction between them. The underlying assumption is that history is a non-fictive, non-imaginative category that relates itself to truth and reality of a historical period. Furthermore, historical knowledge is not a matter of one's antiquarian interest; it shapes human being's sense of the present and helps people build up plans for their future. But what if this understanding of history on which we set up our discourse and practices of the present and future turns out to be radically different from understanding of the natural sciences? In the essay "Historical Knowledge as Literary Artifact" Hayden White interrogates this conventional notion of history. White's position on history created a furore in 1970s and after; especially his demonstration that historians do not retrieve the facts of history through study and research but create a story, was a radical proposition. As you see, the essay's title itself is the basic thesis that he illustrates here. Surrounding this central argument are these points: that the historian is not a neutral observer of historical reality, that historical events do not tell their own stories, it is the historian who construct these stories out of the given facts of chronology, that history is structured like narrative literature. But before delving into the topic, a brief discussion of the life and works of the author will provide you a perspective on the text under discussion.

7.3 Life and Works of Hayden White

Hayden V. White was a prominent American historian and theorist, renowned for his ground-breaking work in the field of historiography. He was born on July 12, 1928, in Martin, Tennessee.

He attended the Wayne State University, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1951. He then pursued his higher studies at the University of Michigan, receiving his Master of Arts in 1952 and Doctor of Philosophy in 1955. White was elected as a Fellow to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1991 and the American Philosophical Society in 2000. He was one of the most influential thinkers who challenged traditional historiography by emphasizing the role of morality, rhetoric, aesthetics, and fiction in shaping historical narratives.

His magnum opus, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), is a seminal work that has reshaped the field of historiography. In this work, White introduced the concept of “metahistorical tropes,” which has since become a cornerstone of historiographical theory. This ground-breaking work is widely regarded as a foundational text of postmodernist critique, which questioned the objective representation of history and instead highlighted the imaginative construction of the past. Following *Metahistory*, White primarily published several books and essays, which were collected in several volumes, including *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1978), *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (1999), and *The Practical Past* (2014). A comprehensive anthology of his essays, *The Fiction of Narrative*, was published in 2010. White was closely acquainted with Carlo Antoni and co-authored several textbooks with him, including *The Emergence of Liberal Humanism* (1966) and *The Ordeal of Liberal Humanism* (1970). He also edited *The Uses of History* (1968) and co-edited *Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium* (1969).

Hayden White was primarily influenced by thinkers like Aristotle, Max Weber, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Roland

Barthes, William J. Bossenbrook, Erich Auerbach, Northrop Frye, and Moses Maimonides. In accordance with thinkers like Roland Barthes and Friedrich Nietzsche, White argued that historical narratives employ poetic conventions to create a “referential illusion,” which obscures the arbitrary nature of historical representation. White’s work emphasized the verbal structure of historical narratives and demonstrated that historical representation is irreducible to logical methodology or scientific inquiry. Instead, he showed that historical narratives reflect choices that are inherently evaluative and subjective. Hayden White’s intellectual legacy is characterized by a deep engagement with the complexities of historical narrative and a commitment to preserving the multiplicity of possible interpretations. His critique of conventional historiography resonated with the linguistic turn in post-war scholarship, which stressed the figural dynamics of texts as objects of discourse.

Hayden White passed away on March 5, 2018, at Santa Cruz, California, at the age of 89. His contributions to the field of historiography have been profound and far-reaching. However, White’s influence extends beyond the field of historiography, with his work resonating across the humanities and social sciences. His works and ideas have had a lasting impact on the way scholars think about historical representation, narrative, and the construction of the past.

SAQ:

Mention some of the significant critical works of Hayden White (50 words)

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7.4 Reading the Essay:

To write the history of a discipline, one must first address metahistorical questions—such as the structure of historical consciousness, the epistemological status of historical explanation, the forms of historical representation, and their authority as secured knowledge of reality. However, as Hayden White argues, historians have paid scant attention to the status of historical narrative itself. The provisional and contingent nature of historical representation—and its susceptibility to revision in light of new evidence—has long been acknowledged by both historians and philosophers of history. Therefore, the provisionality of historical knowledge is not White’s central thesis. His argument is more fundamental: it concerns the consideration of the historical text as *verbal fiction*. Here, White’s argument is twofold: first, that the contents of historical texts are as much *invented* as they are *discovered*; and second, that the *forms*—rather than the contents—of historical texts align more closely with those of literature than with the methodologies of the natural sciences.

The conflation of history with the fictional category comes off as a shock because the distinction between history and fiction—especially myth or literature—has a long tradition, dating back to Aristotle. Aristotle draws a fundamental distinction between history and poetry: history concerns what *has* happened, whereas poetry concerns what *could* happen according to necessity and probability. This binary persists well into the twentieth century. Writers like Sir Philip Sidney, while reasserting the value of poetry, still maintain the Aristotelian distinction between history and literature. In the nineteenth century, with the professionalization of history, historians such as Leopold von Ranke famously called for writing “history as it actually happened.” Northrop Frye, as White notes, argues that “in

a sense the historical is the opposite of the mythical” (“Historical Text”82). Frye observes that when a historian’s narrative begins to take on a mythical shape, it signals a departure from proper historical practice. According to Frye, the accepted yardstick of historical knowledge is truth or falsity, and history, as a discursive mode of writing, ceases to be history when it adopts the fictional or mythic plot structure. White, however, argues to the contrary. He contends that historians gain their explanatory power precisely *by making stories out of chronicles*. The crucial point he makes is this: stories are constructed out of factual sequences drawn from chronicles, and this process is what he terms *emplotment*.

Stop to Consider:

Emplotment:

In narratology and literary practice, *emplotment* refers to the act of organizing a sequence of events into a coherent and meaningful narrative structure. It is the creative process by which raw events—disconnected and unordered in themselves—are shaped into a plot with a beginning, middle, and end. *Emplotment* is a term used by Hayden White to describe the process through which historians turn a sequence of events (a chronicle) into a meaningful story. It involves selecting, arranging, and interpreting events using narrative structures—such as tragedy, comedy, romance, or satire. Through emplotment, historians impart coherence and significance to the past, showing that historical writing is as much about storytelling as it is about factual reporting.

In creative writing, emplotment is not just a technical step—it reflects the writer’s vision and purpose. The same set of events can lead to very different stories depending on how they are plotted.

Thus, emplotment lies at the heart of storytelling, turning facts or fictional ideas into compelling narratives.

The question arises: Is a story implicit in the facts themselves? Referring to R.G. Collingwood, Hayden White illustrates his point. While Collingwood acknowledges the historian as a storyteller who, through “constructive imagination,” can craft a plausible story from fragmentary historical records, White argues that the facts themselves do not inherently contain stories—they are, at best, story elements. The historian does not simply translate these elements into the most plausible story; rather, events are shaped into a narrative through a process involving multiple operations. These include the foregrounding and marginalization of selected elements, the introduction of characterization, the use of recurring motifs, shifts in tone and point of view, and the deployment of varied descriptive strategies—all of which are hallmarks of emplotment in novels or plays. History, therefore, is not a neutral, chronological listing of events in which every detail is treated with equal weight. Such a record would lack the coherence and explanatory power expected of a historical narrative. Moreover, in relation to the raw data of primary sources, historiography actively transforms and reconfigures these elements, assigning them meaning and value within the totality of a constructed historical story. In this sense, historical writing involves not only selection but also invention, as the historian must imaginatively impose narrative form upon disorderly traces of the past. This does not imply fabrication, but rather underscores the creative, rhetorical dimension of historical representation that is often overlooked in conventional historiography.

Metaphor is not about capturing an image of a thing. As White puts it, “Metaphor does not image the thing it seeks to characterize” (91). Rather than functioning as a sign, metaphor operates as a symbol, conveying how we are culturally conditioned to *feel* about the thing it refers to. In this way, historical narratives exploit metaphorical links between the “real” events of history and the conventional structures of our fictions. It is important to distinguish between viewing a historical narrative as a *model* of past events and processes, and regarding it as a *truthful account* of historical reality. Historical narratives do not replicate the past; they offer a model *of* a past society and function as metaphors *for* that historical reality. These metaphors do not present a true picture of the thing or quality being metaphorized. They are distinct from the object, but they also do more than merely re-inscribe the object in different language. A metaphor illuminates a significant aspect of the object at a symbolic level—without ever pretending to be the object itself.

White now moves on to illustrate the problem of the chronological and syntactic dimensions in the sequencing of historical events. He argues that if events *a, b, c, d, e* represent separate historical occurrences connected in chronological order, they can still be variously *emplotted*—that is, interpreted and structured narratively—without disrupting that chronological sequence. Through emplotment, meaning, characterization, and value are assigned to each event. Within this framework, Marxist historiography, for instance, emphasizes the original event (say, *a*) as the foundational cause that determines the unfolding of subsequent events—*b, c, d, e*. On the other hand, apocalyptic historical narratives, such as those offered by St. Augustine, grant full explanatory power to the final event in the sequence. It is important to note that in both cases, the chronological order remains

intact; what changes is the narrative structure and the point of interpretive emphasis.

But chronology is not history. In the chronological ordering of historical events, the meaning of the events does not reveal itself, because meaning is not an intrinsic property of the events. It must be assigned by the historian through a process that, as White argues, is fundamentally literary. To render historical events comprehensible and meaningful to readers, these events must first be cast in figurative, rather than technical, language. Thus, even the identification and description of events prior to their emplotment require the use of figurative language. Moreover, the relationship between events—which goes beyond mere chronology—is also something imposed by the historian. Here, White draws on Roman Jakobson's distinction between the metonymic dimension of the nineteenth-century realist novel and the metaphoric pole of Romantic poetry. While this binary may not fully capture the complexity of literary discourse—since poetry can contain metonymic elements and novels can include metaphorical dimensions—it nevertheless underscores the fact that all verbal discourse is constructed through figurative mechanisms. Historiography, as a form of discursive writing, is no exception; it too is shaped by such figurative structuring.

The various states of affairs that history encompasses are typically presented as having a beginning, a middle, and an end. Both the beginning and the end, however, are poetic constructions—dependent on the figurative language that gives narrative coherence and form to the historical account.

While historians have long emphasized the realism and objectivity of historical narrative in contrast to the fictive nature of the novel, a closer examination of the form and explanatory power of such

narratives reveals that their coherence arises from their encoding in figurative language and their organization through *emplotment*. White, however, is careful to assert that the fact that history is shaped by the historian's mind and narrative structuring does not render it inferior as a form of knowledge. Just as literature—say, the novel—illuminates aspects of human experience, historical narrative similarly illuminates historical reality.

Moreover, White argues that recognizing the fictive dimension of historical writing alerts the historian to the potential risk of turning history into ideology or propaganda. The identification of fictive or literary elements in a historical account can help reveal its ideological bias, thereby enabling historians to construct history in a more self-conscious and critically aware manner.

Check Your Progress:

- What does Hayden White mean by *emplotment*, and how does it challenge the conventional view of historical writing? (70 words)
- How does White distinguish between the chronological order of events and the narrative structure of a historical account? Why is this distinction important? (100 words)
- In what ways does White argue that historical narratives are shaped by figurative language? How does this influence their explanatory power? (60 words)
- How does recognizing the fictive or literary nature of historical writing help historians become more critically aware of ideological bias in their narratives? (80 words)

7.5 Summing Up

Hayden White's basic argument—that various stories can be generated from a given set of historical events—is essentially formalistic. Besides invoking Roman Jakobson and C. S. Peirce, White demonstrates the binary between chronology and story, in a manner reminiscent of the story/*syuzhet* distinction explicated by the Russian Formalists. Of course, plot or *syuzhet* represents a disruption of the chronological order of events. In historical narratives, however, the chronological order is usually retained; only the events are endowed with different meanings and values through the process of *emplotment*.

In "The Historical Text as Narrative Artifact", White argues that historical writing is not merely a neutral recounting of facts but a constructed narrative shaped by literary strategies. He suggests that historians, like fiction writers, rely on techniques such as characterization, plot structures, and narrative closure to render their accounts meaningful and coherent. The form of the narrative is not imposed by the historical data itself but by the historian's choice of narrative structure.

White challenges the notion that there is a clear boundary between history and fiction, contending that both involve imaginative acts of interpretation. He claims that narrative structures do not emerge from the events themselves but from the historian's desire to endow them with a particular meaning, coherence, or moral stance.

In the *Introduction* to *Metahistory*, White offers a "theory of historical work," where the production of such a work involves the following stages: chronicle, story, mode of emplotment, mode of argument, and mode of ideological implication. At the levels of chronicle and story, data is selected from unprocessed historical

records and arranged in a form comprehensible to a specific audience. In a *chronicle*, elements are organized in temporal order. This chronicle is then shaped into a *story* with a discernible beginning, middle, and end. In this process, some events in the chronicle are characterized in terms of an *inaugural motif*, some as *terminating motifs*, and others as *transitional motifs*. Expectations are aroused by transitional motifs, while terminating motifs lend a sense of finality to the course of action. Thus, the selected set of events from the chronicle is *motifically encoded*.

The same event can give rise to different storylines depending on how it is characterized in terms of motifs. Historical narrative, therefore, is not a transparent window into the past but a constructed artifact shaped by rhetorical and narrative choices.

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UNIT- 8

LUCE IRIGARAY: AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

8.1 Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Intellectual Context

8.4 Key Themes

8.5 Major Works

8.6 Legacy and application of her work

8.7 Summing Up

8.8 References and Suggested Reading

8.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will discuss:

- the intellectual background in which Irigaray worked.
- the major texts and their key themes.
- Irigaray's legacy and impact.
- the application of Irigaray's theories to practical life.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

Luce Irigaray, born on 3rd May, 1930 in Blaton, Belgium, is a prominent French feminist philosopher, linguist, psychoanalyst, and cultural theorist. She is renowned for her critical analyses of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, focusing on the representation and treatment of women within these disciplines. Irigaray's multidisciplinary approach combines philosophy,

linguistics, and psychoanalysis; thus, she has become a central figure in contemporary feminist thought.

Irigaray earned a master's degree from the University of Louvain in 1955 and later moved to Paris, where she completed a doctoral degree in linguistics at the University of Paris VIII. Her second doctoral dissertation in philosophy further solidified her scholarly foundation. Throughout her career, Irigaray engaged deeply with the works of major Western philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger; she offered feminist critiques and reinterpretations of their ideas.

One of Irigaray's seminal works, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), presents a critical examination of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and Western philosophical traditions. In this work, Irigaray argues that these fields have historically marginalized or misrepresented women, often reducing them to mere reflections of male subjects. She states that Western discourse is predominantly phallogentric: it privileges male perspectives and relegates women to positions of inferiority or absence. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), she explores the concept of sexual difference, which we will be discussing in detail in the next unit. Irigaray challenges the traditional binary oppositions that define male and female identities. She introduces the idea that female sexuality is fluid and multiple, contrasting it with the singular and rigid representations often imposed by patriarchal structure. She emphasizes on the need for a new language and a symbolic order that can adequately represent women's experiences and identities.

Let us go into detail on the concept of 'sexual difference', which is a central theme in Irigaray's work. She posits that acknowledging and valuing the differences between sexes is crucial for genuine equality and understanding. Irigaray states, "Sexual difference is probably

the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through”(Irigaray 5). She calls for a re-evaluation of existing social, cultural, and linguistic frameworks to create space for feminine subjectivity. Irigaray also critiques the traditional emphasis on mastery and control in Western thought. She advocates for an approach that embraces receptivity and the natural processes of becoming. In her view, “Letting be is as important as mastering. Our tradition has encouraged us to be effective, to make or fabricate but not to let be born or let be” (Irigaray). This philosophy underscores the importance of allowing space for the emergence of new forms of subjectivity and relationality.

Throughout her extensive body of work, Irigaray employs various modes of writing, including analytical essays, poetic expressions, and dialogues. This diverse stylistic approach reflects her commitment to challenging conventional structures of language and thought, aiming to create new avenues for expressing feminine experiences and perspectives. Irigaray's contributions have significantly influenced feminist theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies. Her critiques of phallogentrism and her advocacy for the recognition of sexual difference have inspired scholars and activists to re-examine and transform existing paradigms. She remains active in women's movements in both France and Italy, continuing her efforts to promote gender equality and understanding.

Luce Irigaray's work, therefore, challenges entrenched patriarchal structures in Western thought, advocating for a reimagined discourse that genuinely acknowledges and values sexual difference. Her interdisciplinary approach and innovative critiques continue to resonate, offering profound insights into the intersections of language, identity, and gender.

8.3 INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

Irigaray's intellectual journey unfolded during a period marked by profound shifts in philosophical thought, feminist movements, and psychoanalytic theory. In the 1960s and 1970s, France was a crucible for intellectual innovation, witnessing the rise of structuralism and its subsequent evolution into post-structuralism. Thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes were deconstructing established narratives, challenging the stability of meaning, and interrogating power structures inherent in language and society. Irigaray entered this dynamic milieu, bringing a distinctive feminist perspective to these debates.

Educated in linguistics and psychoanalysis, Irigaray was initially associated with the École Freudienne de Paris, led by Jacques Lacan. Lacan's reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis emphasized the centrality of language in the formation of the unconscious, encapsulated in his assertion that "the unconscious is structured like a language." While Lacan's ideas were revolutionary, Irigaray identified inherent patriarchal biases within his frameworks. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, she argued that Western philosophy and psychoanalysis had systematically marginalized the feminine, constructing women as reflections or "specula" of male subjects rather than as autonomous beings.

This critique led to her expulsion from Lacan's school, underscoring the contentious nature of her interventions. Undeterred, Irigaray continued to challenge the phallocentric underpinnings of Western thought. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), she introduced the concept of "écriture féminine" or "feminine writing," advocating for modes of expression that transcend traditional, male-dominated structures of language. She posited that women's sexuality and subjectivity are multiple and fluid, contrasting with the singular and

rigid representations often imposed by patriarchal discourse. Irigaray's contemporaries included other influential feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Together, they formed the core of what became known as "French feminism," a movement characterized by its focus on language, psychoanalysis, and the deconstruction of gender binaries. While each had distinct approaches, they collectively sought to unravel the deep-seated biases embedded in Western philosophical and psychoanalytic traditions.

The broader socio-political context of the 1970s was also instrumental in shaping Irigaray's work. The women's liberation movement was gaining momentum globally, challenging traditional gender roles, advocating for reproductive rights, and demanding equality in the workplace. In France, feminist groups were particularly active, engaging in debates about sexuality, identity, and the politics of the body. Irigaray's emphasis on sexual difference and her critique of the symbolic order resonated with these movements, offering a theoretical foundation for understanding the systemic nature of women's oppression. Luce Irigaray's intellectual contributions must be understood against the backdrop of a transformative era in French philosophy and global feminist activism. Her work not only critiqued existing paradigms but also proposed new ways of thinking about language, subjectivity, and the feminine, leaving an indelible mark on contemporary thought.

Stop to Consider:

Before becoming a leading feminist thinker, Irigaray studied linguistics and psychology, which shaped her innovative critiques of language and gender. Her interdisciplinary background allowed her to bridge the gaps between philosophy, psychoanalysis, and feminism.

8.4 KEY THEMES

Irigaray's work delves into several key themes, each contributing to a nuanced understanding of sexual difference and the critique of Western philosophical traditions. Given below are the key themes of Irigaray's work in detail—

- **Critique of phallogentrism:** Irigaray critiques the dominance of phallogentrism in Western discourse, where male perspectives are central, and female perspectives are marginalized. She argues that this male-centric viewpoint reduces women to mere reflections of men, denying them autonomous subjectivity. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, she states, "The feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects" (Irigaray). This critique challenges the foundational structures of language and thought that perpetuate male dominance.
- **Concept of 'Sexual Difference':** Central to Irigaray's philosophy is the concept of sexual difference. She posits that recognizing and valuing the differences between sexes is crucial for genuine equality and understanding. Irigaray emphasizes on a re-evaluation of existing social, cultural, and linguistic frameworks to create space for female subjectivity.
- **Critique of psychoanalytic theory:** Irigaray critically examines traditional psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, for their portrayal of female sexuality as a lack or deficiency. She challenges the notion that women define themselves through the absence of the male organ, advocating instead for a positive affirmation of female sexuality. In her critique, she questions, "How can we accept that the entire female sexuality is being controlled by the lack and envy of the

penis?” This question seeks to redefine female sexuality beyond patriarchal constraints.

- **Language and Symbolism:** Irigaray explores how language and symbolic systems have been constructed to favour male experiences, often excluding or misrepresenting female perspectives. She advocates for the development of a new language that can express feminine experiences authentically. In her essay “When Our Lips Speak Together”, she writes, “No surface holds: no figures, lines, and points; no ground subsists. But there is no abyss. For us, depth does not mean a chasm” (Irigaray). This poetic expression underscores the need for a language that transcends traditional, male-dominated structures.
- **The Maternal and the Feminine:** Irigaray addresses the symbolic erasure of the maternal and the feminine in Western thought. She argues that the maternal body has been overlooked or devalued, leading to a lack of representation of women’s unique experiences. By re-centering the maternal, Irigaray seeks to reclaim the significance of women’s roles and identities. She states, “Each sex has a relation to madness. Every desire has a relation to madness. But it would seem that one desire has been taken as wisdom, moderation, truth, leaving to the other sex the weight of a madness that cannot be acknowledged or accommodated” (Irigaray). This highlights the imbalance in how male and female desires are perceived and valued.
- **Ethics of Sexual Difference:** Irigaray proposes an ethics based on the recognition and respect of sexual difference. She suggests that ethical relationships must acknowledge the otherness of the other, moving beyond assimilation or

domination. This ethical framework emphasizes mutual respect and the celebration of difference. She articulates, “Self-affection is the real dwelling to which we must always return with a view to a faithfulness to ourselves and an ability to welcome the other as different” (Irigaray). This encourages individuals to embrace their own identities while honouring the distinctiveness of others.

- **Reinterpretation of Western Philosophical Texts:** Irigaray reinterprets classical Western philosophical texts, revealing their inherent gender biases. She engages with the works of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel, demonstrating how their ideas have contributed to the marginalization of women. Through her critiques, she aims to uncover alternative readings that allow for the inclusion of feminine perspectives. This endeavour seeks to reconstruct philosophical discourse to be more inclusive and representative of both sexes.
- **Advocacy for a New Symbolic Order:** Irigaray calls for the establishment of a new symbolic order that recognizes and values feminine subjectivity. She argues that the current symbolic order is phallogentric and fails to accommodate women’s experiences and identities. By creating a new symbolic framework, Irigaray envisions a culture where both masculine and feminine perspectives are equally valued. This involves redefining cultural norms, language, and social structures to be more inclusive.

Check Your Progress:

1. Why was Irigaray expelled from Lacanian psychoanalytic circles? (50 words)
2. How does Irigaray critique Western philosophy? (50 words)

8.5 MAJOR WORKS

In this section, we will discuss the major works by Irigaray. We will cover them in some detail:

1. *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974): Irigaray critiques the phallogentric nature of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis. By focusing on texts from philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant, as well as on psychoanalytic theories from Freud and Lacan, Irigaray argues that these traditions have systematically excluded or misrepresented the feminine, positioning women as mere reflections or “specula” of male subjects rather than as autonomous beings. Women, according to Irigaray, are seen as constructs formed after the form of man, a being with no status of her own. Irigaray illustrates how “the feminine has been colonised by a male fantasy of an inverted other through which he can project himself as subject, while woman functions only as object for and between men” (Russell).
2. *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977): Building upon her previous critiques, Irigaray explores the commodification of women in patriarchal societies. She draws upon Karl Marx’s theory of capital and commodities to claim that women are exchanged between men in the same way as any other commodity. Irigaray argues that our entire society is predicated on this exchange of women. She states, “As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value” (Irigaray). This highlights how women are objectified and valued based on their utility and exchangeability within a male-dominated economy. Further, she asserts, “Female sexuality has always been

conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters” (Irigaray 23). Irigaray believes that women’s sexuality is inherently plural and fluid; she states that women’s pleasure cannot be encapsulated within a single framework. Therefore, she challenges the singular, reductionist and rigid representations imposed by patriarchal discourse, and advocates for a more nuanced understanding that embraces the complexity of female sexuality. Critics like Rachel Jones note the significant impact that this text has had on feminist philosophy.

3. ***An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1984)***: Irigaray explores the concept of sexual difference and calls for an ethical framework that respects and recognizes the distinctiveness of the feminine. She critiques the traditional Western philosophical tendency to subsume differences into a universal, often male-centric, norm. She argues that “sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age” (Irigaray5). Stephen David Ross, in *Plenishment in the Earth: An Ethic of Inclusion*, acknowledges Irigaray's significant contribution to feminist philosophy, noting that she offers “the strongest feminist reading in the history of philosophy” (Ross233). However, some scholars question the feasibility of her proposed ethics. The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* highlights debates surrounding potential essentialism in Irigaray's emphasis on sexual difference, suggesting that her focus might inadvertently reinforce binary gender distinctions. However, Irigaray's intertwining of philosophical critique with poetic language has been both lauded and critiqued. While some appreciate her innovative approach, others find

it obscures her arguments. As noted in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* on eNotes, “Irigaray provides her answer to the author’s two questions about the importance of sexual difference in language. Her answers help illuminate many of the chief ideas found in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* and give a brief overview of her ideas on language and sexuality in general”.

4. ***Elemental Passions* (1982):** In this book, Irigaray explores the relationship between language, desire, and the body. She critiques the traditional philosophical emphasis on vision and the privileging of sight as a metaphor for knowledge, arguing that this focus marginalizes other sensory experiences and reinforces a detached, objective stance. Irigaray proposes an alternative approach that embraces touch and fluidity, emphasizing the importance of embodied experiences and the interconnectedness of subjects. This text challenges readers to reconsider the ways in which language and knowledge are constructed, advocating for a more inclusive and holistic understanding of human experience.

The text is structured as a monologue addressed to a lover. It is a profound meditation on love, language, and sexual difference, articulated through a series of lyrical reflections on the senses and the four elements. It explores the complexities of intimate relationships and the interplay between self and other, between subject and object. Critics have noted that *Elemental Passions* employs a poetic and evocative style that resists straightforward interpretation – this is intentionally done by Irigaray who seeks to disrupt conventional philosophical discourse.

5. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger (1983)*: In this text, Irigaray analyses the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, particularly his exploration of the elements and the concept of Being. She critiques Heidegger's emphasis on the elements of earth and sky, and his neglect of the element of air, arguing that this omission reflects a broader tendency in Western philosophy to overlook the invisible, the fluid, and the feminine. Irigaray suggests that by forgetting air, philosophy has neglected the spaces and intervals that allow for movement, change, and relationality. By re-engaging with the element of air, we can open up new possibilities for understanding sexual difference and the dynamics of subjectivity. Joanne Faulkner, in her analysis of Irigaray's work, notes that Irigaray seeks to "begin to think out the Being of sexedness and the sexedness of Being," suggesting that Heidegger's philosophy inadequately addresses the embodied and gendered dimensions of existence. Sarah Falcus further observes that Irigaray's critique "offers a fundamental rereading of basic tenets in Western metaphysics". Therefore, Irigaray encourages the incorporation of the feminine and the elemental into ontological considerations.

6. *To Be Two (1997)*: Irigaray explores the dynamics of relationships and the concept of "being two" as opposed to the traditional philosophical emphasis on individualism and unity. She argues that genuine relationships require the recognition and preservation of difference, rather than the assimilation of the other into the self. Dialogue is important, so is respect and the acknowledgement of the other's autonomy in forming meaningful connections. This work

extends her earlier critiques of phallocentrism by proposing a model of relationality that honours sexual difference and promotes mutual growth and transformation. Ada S. Jaarsma explores Irigaray's engagement with religious narratives to illuminate the ethical stakes involved in recognizing sexual difference. Jaarsma argues that Irigaray's use of sacred stories challenges traditional conceptions of identity and divinity, and focuses on the necessity of embracing difference as a fundamental aspect of ethical relationships.

7. *Sharing the World* (2008): In this later work, Irigaray addresses the challenges of globalization and multiculturalism, emphasizing the need for an ethics of difference that respects diverse identities and perspectives. She critiques the homogenizing tendencies of global culture and advocates for practices of "letting be" that allow individuals and cultures to flourish in their uniqueness. Irigaray writes, "Letting be is as important as mastering. Our tradition has encouraged us to be effective, to make or fabricate but not to let be born or let be" (Irigaray). The need is to shift from a mindset of control and domination to one of openness, harmony, and receptivity. Central to Irigaray's thesis is the concept of "self-affection", which she posits as essential for human dignity. She states, "Self-affection is the real dwelling to which we must always return with a view to a faithfulness to ourselves and an ability to welcome the other as different" (Irigaray 75). Therefore, Irigaray calls for a paradigm shift from a culture of assimilation to one of genuine hospitality and respect for difference.

SAQ:

1. What is the main argument of *Speculum of the Other Woman*? (50 words)

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.....

2. What is the significance of air in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*? (50 words)

.....
.....

3. How does Irigaray approach globalization in *Sharing the World*? (50 words)

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.....

8.6 LEGACY AND APPLICATION OF HER WORK

In this unit, we have covered an introduction to Luce Irigaray. She has significantly influenced contemporary feminist theory, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Her extensive body of work challenges traditional Western thought, particularly its patriarchal underpinnings. Her work has significantly influenced contemporary feminist theory, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Irigaray states that Western metaphysics and psychoanalysis have historically marginalized the feminine and positioned women as reflections of men rather than individuals capable of autonomy. This perspective is evident in her analysis of male philosophers, where she discusses themes essential to her ethics, such as creative relationships between men and women that are not based on reproduction, separate 'places' for men and women (both emotional and embodied), wonder at the difference of the other, acknowledgement of finiteness and intersubjectivity, and an embodied divinity. Moreover, her concept of sexual difference has sparked debate among scholars, with some viewing it as essentialist, while others interpret it as a call

to acknowledge and value diversity. Critics have also examined Irigaray's methodologies and philosophical positions. For example, her use of mimesis corresponds to a radical criticism of the exclusion of women from philosophy, in which the meaning of the feminine and the lack of female representation in philosophical discourse are highlighted. Critics have also argued that her focus on sexual difference may inadvertently reinforce binary thinking. Her writing style has been described as challenging, which limits its accessibility.

Given below are the ways in which Irigaray's work has been applied to various practical domains:

- **Feminist Pedagogy and Language Reform:** Irigaray's critique of patriarchal language structures has inspired educational reforms aimed at fostering inclusive communication. Her concept of *écriture féminine* advocates for a writing style that embodies feminine subjectivity and challenges traditional linguistic norms. Irigaray's methods of mimesis and strategic essentialism are central to changing contemporary culture. Educators are encouraged to promote diverse expressions in classrooms, validating multiple perspectives and experiences.
- **Psychoanalysis and Therapeutic Practices:** The concept of sexual difference has led to more nuanced therapeutic approaches. By acknowledging the distinct experiences of individuals based on gender, therapists can better address the unique psychological needs of their clients; this promotes personalized care for individuals.
- **Political Theory and Ethics of Difference:** Irigaray suggest that political relations at all levels must be rooted in difference rather than sameness, starting with sexual

difference. This concept respect diversity and moves beyond assimilationist approaches.

Irigaray's work continues to inspire discussions on how to implement her ideas in practical contexts. Her work has inspired a vast array of feminist scholarship and has been the subject of countless critical analyses. The book *Rewriting Difference: Luce Irigaray and 'the Greeks'* recognizes Irigaray as a feminist philosopher whose work has itself produced an impressive legacy of diverse and vital criticism among major thinkers.

Stop to Consider:

An interesting fact about Irigaray is that she has been conducting a week-long seminar in the United Kingdom for over 15 years for research scholars doing their PhD on her work. The seminar is conducted in English, and the researchers come from across the world. Volumes comprising the presentations of the researchers in the seminar have also been published.

8.7 SUMMING UP

In this unit, I have given you a detailed introduction to Luce Irigaray, her life, the background in which she worked, and her major works. Her impact is indelible from the pages of modern Western feminism. In the next unit, we will cover in detail Irigaray's concept of 'sexual difference'.

Check Your Progress:

1. Does Irigaray's concept of sexual difference reinforce gender binaries?
2. How does Irigaray challenge phallocentric discourse?
3. What are some of the criticisms of Irigaray's ideas?

8.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT- 9

LUCE IRIGARAY: “SEXUAL DIFFERENCE”

Unit Structure:

9.1 Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Theoretical Foundations

9.3.1 Foundational Figures in Phallogentric Psychoanalysis

9.3.2 Phallogentric Psychoanalysis and the Marginalization of Women

9.3.3 Theoretical Foundations of Sexual Difference

9.3.4 Irigaray’s Conception of Sexual Difference

9.4 Conceptualizing “Sexual Difference”

9.5 Cultural, Ethical, and Philosophical Implications

9.6 Critical Impact and Contemporary Relevance

9.7 Summing Up

9.8 References and Suggested Reading

9.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Irigaray’s concept of “sexual difference”;
- the theory behind the concept;
- the ethical and cultural implications of the concept;
- the critical legacy of “sexual difference”.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Luce Irigaray, a prominent Belgian-born French feminist philosopher, psychoanalyst, and linguist, has significantly

influenced contemporary feminist thought through her exploration of sexual difference. Her work critically examines Western culture's linguistic and philosophical structures, arguing that they have historically marginalized women's experiences and identities. In the previous unit, you were introduced to her and her work in some detail. Irigaray's concept of sexual difference, which we will discuss in this unit, challenges traditional psychoanalytic and philosophical theories, and advocates for a recognition of feminine subjectivity and the development of a culture that truly acknowledges and values the differences between the sexes.

Irigaray's engagement with psychoanalysis is both foundational and critical. Drawing from her background in the field, she scrutinizes the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, particularly their interpretations of subject formation and sexual difference. Freud's assertion that "little girls are only little men" exemplifies, in Irigaray's view, a male-centric perspective that reduces women to deviations from the male norm. She contends that Freud's framework fails to account for female subjectivity, effectively rendering women as defective men. Lacan's concept of the Phallus as the central signifier in the Symbolic order further perpetuates this bias. Although Lacan claims that the Phallus is not directly tied to male anatomy, Irigaray argues that it remains a projection of male experience, reinforcing a one-sided model of subjectivity. She asserts that this framework privileges male perspectives and neglects the unique experiences and identities of women.

Central to Irigaray's critique is the role of language in perpetuating gender biases. She observes that many languages, such as French, default to masculine forms, even in mixed-gender contexts, thereby rendering the feminine invisible. For instance, in French, any plural involving both genders defaults to the masculine form, and significant cultural symbols like "God" ("le Dieu") and "Sun" ("le

soleil”) are masculine. Irigaray argues that this linguistic structure not only reflects but also reinforces a cultural imaginary dominated by male perspectives, effectively silencing women’s voices and experiences.

Irigaray extends her critique to Western philosophical traditions, challenging the works of philosophers from Plato to Emmanuel Levinas. She contends that philosophical discourse has historically subordinated the feminine, often reducing women to the status of the Other or merely a reflection of male subjectivity. In her analysis of Levinas, for example, she critiques his portrayal of the feminine as merely a vessel for male *jouissance*, arguing that such representations deny women their own subjectivity and agency.

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray emphasizes the necessity of reexamining history to understand why sexual difference has not been allowed to develop fully. She advocates for the creation of new cultural paradigms that recognize and celebrate sexual difference, proposing that such an ethics would lead to more authentic relationships between the sexes. Irigaray also explores how the prevailing cultural and psychoanalytic frameworks suppress women's desires and relationships, particularly those between women. She argues that women are often denied the right to individual love and are instead expected to fulfill roles that serve men and children. This dynamic effectively silences love between women, whether in the context of friendships, mother-daughter relationships, or romantic partnerships. Irigaray suggests that acknowledging and valuing these relationships could destabilize the male-centered subjectivity that underpins phallogentric culture. To transcend the limitations imposed by phallogentric culture, Irigaray proposes a reorientation towards self-cultivation and mutual recognition. She draws inspiration from Eastern philosophies, advocating for an appreciation of oneself and others that does not

rely on possession or domination. By fostering a sense of self grounded in one's own body and experiences, individuals can engage in relationships that respect and celebrate difference without seeking to appropriate the other.

9.3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The concept of sexual difference has been a pivotal subject in psychoanalytic and feminist discourses. Luce Irigaray, a prominent figure in this realm, offers a critical perspective on traditional psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, which she argues have historically marginalized women by positioning them as the 'Other' in a phallogentric framework. This analysis examines the foundational figures and theories of phallogentric psychoanalysis that have contributed to the marginalization of women, delves into the theoretical underpinnings of sexual difference, and elucidates Irigaray's interpretation.

9.3.1 Foundational Figures in Phallogentric Psychoanalysis

The primary figures associated with the development of phallogentric psychoanalysis are Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

- **Sigmund Freud**: As the founder of psychoanalysis, Freud's theories on psychosexual development and the unconscious have been foundational. However, his perspectives on female development, particularly concepts like 'penis envy,' have been critiqued for reinforcing patriarchal notions and positioning women as deficient.

- **Jacques Lacan**: Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud introduced structuralist and linguistic dimensions to psychoanalysis. His concept of the 'Phallus' as the central signifier in the Symbolic order has been influential but also controversial for its implications regarding gender and power dynamics.

9.3.2 Phallocentric Psychoanalysis and the Marginalization of Women

Phallocentric psychoanalysis refers to theoretical frameworks that centre the male experience and the Phallus as the primary signifier of meaning and authority, leading to the marginalization of women.

- **Freud's Contribution**: Freud's theories have been critiqued for their patriarchal underpinnings. An exhibition at the Freud Museum in London, titled "Women & Freud: Patients, Pioneers, Artists," examines how Freud's psychoanalytic theories inadvertently influenced the understanding of female desire. Although Freud was a patriarchal figure, his practices unintentionally revealed the complexities of the female psyche and opened doors for feminist discourse.
- **Lacan's Influence**: Lacan's emphasis on the Phallus as the central signifier in the Symbolic order has been criticized for reinforcing male dominance. Irigaray challenges Lacan's claim that the Phallus is an ahistorical master signifier, arguing that it is ultimately an extension of Freud's one-sex model. She contends that the Symbolic order is constructed and influenced by male biases, which perpetuate the marginalization of women.

9.3.3 Theoretical Foundations of Sexual Difference

Sexual difference refers to the distinctions between sexes as constructed through cultural, linguistic, and psychological frameworks, rather than being solely based on biological differences. In psychoanalytic theory, this concept has been shaped significantly by the works of Freud and Lacan.

- **Sigmund Freud's Perspective:** Freud introduced the idea that anatomical differences between males and females lead to distinct psychological developments. He posited that women experience 'penis envy' and perceive themselves as lacking, which contributes to their development as the 'Other' in a male-centered society. This notion has been critiqued for reinforcing patriarchal structures and diminishing female agency.
- **Jacques Lacan's Interpretation:** Lacan reinterpreted Freud's ideas through the lens of structural linguistics, introducing the concept of the 'Phallus' as the central signifier in the Symbolic order. He argued that individuals become subjects within society by relating to this Phallus, which is associated with authority and power. In this framework, women are positioned as 'lacking' the Phallus, thereby reinforcing their status as the 'Other' and perpetuating a phallogentric view of subjectivity.

9.3.4 Irigaray's Conception of Sexual Difference

Luce Irigaray challenges the traditional psychoanalytic notions of sexual difference by critiquing their inherent biases and proposing

alternative frameworks that acknowledge and value female subjectivity.

- **Critique of Phallogentrism:** Irigaray argues that Western culture, through its philosophical and psychoanalytic traditions, has constructed a male-dominated discourse that marginalizes women. She asserts that the Symbolic order is not an ahistorical structure but is shaped by power dynamics that privilege male experiences and perspectives. In her work *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray critiques Freud's assertion that women are essentially "little men," highlighting his inability to perceive women outside of a male-centric framework.
- **Imaginary and Symbolic Orders:** Building on Lacan's concepts, Irigaray discusses how the imaginary body and the Symbolic order contribute to the construction of gender identities. She emphasizes that the dominant cultural imaginary is male, leading to the privileging of attributes associated with masculinity, such as unity and visibility. This male imaginary influences fields like philosophy, psychoanalysis, and science, resulting in the marginalization of women.
- **Advocacy for a New Language:** Irigaray advocates for the development of a new language and symbolic system that can articulate female experiences and subjectivities. She believes that by creating spaces where women's voices and perspectives are recognized and valued, it is possible to move beyond the limitations imposed by a phallogentric discourse.

Stop to Consider:

Beyond her academic pursuits, Irigaray was notoriously secretive about her private life. However, she engaged in activities that bridged the gap between body and mind. In her nineties, she authored the book *A New Culture of Energy: Beyond East and West* (2021), in which she discusses her decades-long practice of yoga, including ‘asanas’ (postures) and ‘pranayama’ (breathing techniques). She posits that yoga serves as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual, reflecting her interest in integrating diverse cultural practices into her philosophical framework.

Check Your Progress:

1. In what ways did Sigmund Freud’s theories contribute to the development of phallocentric perspectives within psychoanalysis? (100 words)
2. How did Jacques Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freudian theory reinforce or challenge the phallocentric underpinnings of psychoanalysis? (100 words)

9.4 CONCEPTUALIZING “SEXUAL DIFFERENCE”

The concept of “sexual difference” has evolved through various intellectual traditions, notably psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and poststructuralism. It addresses the distinctions between sexes as constructed through cultural, linguistic, and psychological frameworks, moving beyond mere biological determinism. This exploration traces the development of sexual difference, highlighting key contributions and critiques that have shaped its understanding.

- **Early Psychoanalytic Foundations**

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories laid the groundwork for discussions on sexual difference. Freud posited that anatomical distinctions between males and females significantly influence psychological development. He introduced concepts such as "penis envy" in females and "castration anxiety" in males, suggesting that these experiences are pivotal in shaping gender identities. Freud's framework implied a normative male standard, with female development characterized by a perceived lack or absence. This perspective has been critiqued for reinforcing patriarchal notions and failing to account for female subjectivity.

- **Lacanian Reinterpretation**

Jacques Lacan expanded upon Freudian ideas by incorporating structural linguistics into psychoanalysis. He introduced the concept of the "Phallus" as the ultimate signifier within the Symbolic order, representing authority and meaning. In Lacan's schema, individuals achieve subjectivity by positioning themselves in relation to this Phallus. Consequently, women are construed as "lacking" the Phallus, thereby reinforcing their status as the "Other" in a phallogentric society. Lacan's emphasis on language and symbolism further entrenched the marginalization of female experiences within psychoanalytic discourse.

- **Feminist Critiques and Reconceptualizations**

Feminist theorists have critically engaged with these psychoanalytic models to challenge and redefine the notion of sexual difference. Irigaray was a prominent figure in this discourse; she argues that Western thought has historically operated within a monosexual paradigm that privileges masculinity. She contends that true sexual difference has been suppressed, with femininity constructed as a mere negation of masculinity. Irigaray advocates for recognizing

and valuing feminine subjectivity, emphasizing the need for a symbolic order that accommodates genuine sexual difference. She asserts that human nature is inherently sexed, and that acknowledging this is crucial for the development of a more inclusive and representative cultural framework.

- **Poststructuralist Perspectives**

Poststructuralist thinkers, including Rosi Braidotti, have further interrogated the concept of sexual difference by deconstructing traditional notions of subjectivity. Braidotti emphasizes the fluidity and multiplicity of identities, challenging the fixed binaries of male and female. She argues that subjectivity is a process shaped by diverse and intersecting power relations. This perspective opens up possibilities for understanding sexual difference beyond rigid dichotomies, advocating for a more nuanced appreciation of individual experiences and identities.

9.5 CULTURAL, ETHICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

Irigaray's critiques of phallogentric psychoanalysis have opened avenues for rethinking sexual difference, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing and valuing female subjectivity. Her work underscores the importance of developing new cultural and philosophical frameworks that move beyond male-centred paradigms.

Following are the cultural and philosophical implications:

- **Challenging Universal Discourse:** Irigaray critiques the purportedly neutral and universal discourses developed within patriarchal contexts, arguing that they often erase the

specificity of female subjectivity. She emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the “I” and “you” in discourse to prevent the disappearance of genuine dialogue and recognition between genders. She asserts, “Should the difference between the I and the you disappear, so do demand, thanks, appeals, questions...”

- **Sexuation of Language**: Recognizing that language has been dominated by masculine perspectives, Irigaray advocates for imprinting language with a “mark of gender” to reflect true sexual difference. She analyzes how grammatical structures, such as the masculine gender of collective plurals in French, perpetuate male dominance in discourse. By restructuring language to incorporate feminine perspectives, Irigaray aims to create a new culture conscious of sexual difference.
- **Critique of Philosophical Traditions**: Irigaray challenges philosophical discourses that have historically subordinated the feminine. She argues that philosophical logos often reduce all others to the economy of the Same, eradicating the difference between the sexes. Irigaray emphasizes the need to disrupt these discourses to allow for the emergence of genuine sexual difference.
- **Reimagining Subjectivity**: By critiquing traditional psychoanalytic theories, Irigaray opens the door for reimagining subjectivity in a way that includes female experiences. She underscores the importance of developing new narratives that do not position women as the 'Other' but as subjects in their own right. This involves recognizing the multiplicity and fluidity of female sexuality and subjectivity.

9.6 CRITICAL IMPACT AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Luce Irigaray's exploration of sexual difference has profoundly influenced feminist philosophy, psychoanalysis, and contemporary discussions on gender and identity. Her critique of phallogentric discourse and advocacy for recognizing genuine sexual difference have sparked critical debates and inspired diverse perspectives. This analysis examines the critical impact and contemporary relevance of Irigaray's concept of sexual difference, highlighting its influence on feminist theory, challenges to traditional psychoanalytic frameworks, and implications for contemporary gender discourse.

- **Transforming Feminist Theory**

Irigaray's work has been instrumental in shifting feminist discourse from a focus on equality to an emphasis on difference. She argues that striving for equality within existing patriarchal structures often leads to the assimilation of women into male-defined norms, thereby perpetuating their marginalization. Instead, Irigaray advocates for the recognition and valuation of sexual difference, proposing that women develop their subjectivity based on a combination of their morphology, the symbols and language associated with it, and their interactions with others and broader culture. This perspective challenges the notion of a singular human experience, emphasizing the need to acknowledge and celebrate differences between sexes.

- **Challenging Psychoanalytic Norms**

Irigaray's critique extends to traditional psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Freud and Lacan, which she contends are rooted in male-centric perspectives. She challenges the primacy assigned to the phallus and the portrayal of women as lacking or as mere reflections of male desire. By exposing these biases, Irigaray calls for a reconfiguration of psychoanalytic practices to incorporate

female subjectivity and experiences, thereby promoting a more inclusive understanding of human psychology.

- **Influencing Contemporary Gender Discourse**

In today's discussions on gender and identity, Irigaray's concept of sexual difference remains highly relevant. Her ideas have been engaged in debates surrounding gender fluidity, non-binary identities, and the social construction of gender. While some critics argue that her emphasis on sexual difference reinforces binary thinking, others interpret her work as opening avenues for recognizing a spectrum of differences beyond traditional male-female dichotomies. This ongoing dialogue underscores the complexity and adaptability of Irigaray's theories in addressing contemporary issues of identity and difference.

- **Addressing Intersectionality and Inclusivity**

Irigaray's focus on sexual difference has also prompted discussions on intersectionality, particularly concerning race, class, and sexuality. Her work has been critiqued for not sufficiently addressing these intersecting identities. However, subsequent scholars have built upon her theories to explore how multiple forms of difference interact and shape individual experiences. This expansion of Irigaray's framework contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of identity politics.

- **Ethical and Philosophical Implications**

Irigaray's advocacy for recognizing sexual difference carries significant ethical and philosophical implications. She challenges the universal applicability of male-centred norms and calls for the development of frameworks that honour and incorporate diverse perspectives. This approach not only critiques existing power structures but also envisions a society where differences are

acknowledged and valued, fostering more equitable and authentic relationships between individuals.

- **Relevance to Queer Theory**

Irigaray’s exploration of sexual difference has also found resonance within queer theory. Her critique of phallogentric structures and emphasis on the fluidity of identity align with queer critiques of rigid gender binaries. By challenging traditional notions of subjectivity and advocating for the recognition of diverse identities, Irigaray’s work contributes to broader discussions on the complexities of gender and sexuality.

SAQ:

1. In contemporary psychoanalytic practice, how can Irigaray's insights into sexual difference inform more inclusive and equitable therapeutic approaches? (100 words)
.....
.....
.....
2. What are the key critiques that Luce Irigaray raises against Freud's conceptualization of female sexuality, particularly regarding notions like 'penis envy'? (100 words)
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.....
.....

9.7 SUMMING UP

Luce Irigaray’s concept of sexual difference offers a profound critique of the ways in which Western culture’s linguistic, psychoanalytic, and philosophical traditions have marginalized women’s experiences and identities. By challenging these frameworks and advocating for the recognition of feminine subjectivity, Irigaray calls for the creation of new cultural paradigms

that genuinely acknowledge and value sexual difference. Her work continues to inspire critical thought and dialogue in feminist theory, philosophy, and beyond, encouraging a reevaluation of how we understand identity, language, and relationships between the sexes.

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UNIT– 10

HOMI. K. BHABHA: AN INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure:

- 10.1 Introduction**
- 10.2 Objectives**
- 10.3 A Brief Life Sketch of Homi Bhabha**
- 10.4 Key Concepts Introduced By The Critic**
- 10.5 Bhabha' s Notion of The 'Nation'**
- 10.6 Summing Up**
- 10.7 Modal Questions**
- 10.8 References and Suggested Readings**

10.1 INTRODUCTION

20th century witnessed the defeat of the erstwhile European colonial order and the emergence of newly independent, sovereign countries throughout the world. As the decolonization of earlier colonies continued, the consequential impact of it was particularly felt in the fields of philosophy, politics and literary and cultural studies. The victims of colonial regimes demanded to re-study, question, decenter, and re-imagine certain colonial biases that had been firmly placed as rigid factual structures in the society and world order. Some of these biases include the binary between the superior, European, civilized 'Us' and the inferior, Oriental, uncivilized 'Them'. Thinkers, philosophers and critics started questioning the institutions of colonialism and their residual influence that shaped public opinion through the field of study called Post-Colonialism. One such significant thinker and theorist is Homi K Bhabha. Bhabha's works focuses primarily on the dynamic between the

colonizers and the colonized in the contemporary decolonized society.

10.2. OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to one of the pioneering contributors to the field of Post-Colonialism, Homi K Bhabha. You will learn about some of the key concepts and ideas proposed by Bhabha and their subsequent influence on other fields of literary studies such as Critical Race Theory and Cultural Studies. You will also learn about the various influences on Bhabha's theories and concepts. After going through the unit, you will be able to

- *understand* the colonial influences that impact the Post-Colonial identity formation and behaviour pattern;
- *explain* Bhabha's concept of Hybrid identity and its various manifestations in the contemporary world;
- *analyze* the power struggle between the colonizer and the colonized;
- *scrutinize* the implicit and explicit ideas of a Nation.

10.3 A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF HOMI BHABHA

Post-Colonialism as a field of study developed alongside the process of decolonization and the rise of nationalist movements in various colonies across the world. As a field of study, Post-Colonialism is primarily concerned with taking back the power as well as voice from the colonial powers and reconstructing the identities of the erstwhile colonies, without the colonial gaze. This field of study attempts to deconstruct the binaries and hierarchies that often divide the world into two halves, the Orient and the Occident, the East and the West, wherein the Orient or the East had been always defined as

an antithesis to the Occident or the West. Figures like Edward Said, Franz Fanon and Walter Scott are some of the early practitioners of Post-Colonialism. As the theory evolved, newer concepts and ideas about the everlasting effect of colonial past were proposed by many theorists, giving a voice to the otherwise voiceless communities. The oppressed and the marginalized were given the center stage to tell their side of the story.

Homi K Bhabha is one of the leading voices of contemporary Post-Colonial studies. His works are primarily concerned with the aftereffects of colonialism that still lingers in the previously colonized, and now newly independent countries. Bhabha intensely focuses upon the identity formation and the collective reclaiming of power and narrative of the Post-Colonial subjecthood. His concepts like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and the Nation challenge the status quo that was established by the colonial powers.

Homi K Bhabha was born to a Parsi family in the year 1949 in Bombay, India. Bhabha's experience of growing up in a minority community shaped his later ideas of identity and culture. He attended the St. Mary's High School in Mazagaon, Mumbai. Bhabha was deeply interested in academia right from an early age. He had graduated with a degree of Bachelor of Arts from Elphinstone college under the University of Mumbai. Later he had gone to the UK to pursue his further education. He had completed his post graduation with a Master of Arts degree in English literature from Christ Church College under Oxford University. From the same institution, Bhabha had also received his M. Phil and D. Phil degrees. Bhabha's spectacular academic records had earned him a lecturer position at the Department of English in the University of Sussex which he continued to sustain for ten years.

Bhabha's career as an academician is studded with several prestigious positions which highlight his caliber as an educator. He had pursued his research as a senior fellow at Princeton University where he also taught as the Old Dominion visiting professor. Further, he was the Steinberg visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania. After that, Bhabha worked as a faculty fellow of the school of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth College. Bhabha's career extends to faculty positions in several universities like Chester D. Tripp Professor in the Humanities at the University of Chicago from 1997 to 2001 and visiting professor at University College, London during the year 2001-02. Apart from being the Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University since 2001, Homi Bhabha also serves on the Editorial Collective of *Public Culture*, an academic journal published by Duke University Press. Bhabha has been listed amongst the great intellectuals of the contemporary academia by many.

Bhabha's works concentrate on challenging the notion of the Third World as a homogenized identity. This narrativisation of the erstwhile colonies into certain attributes create stereotypes that secure the power back in the hands of the dominant group, the West. Bhabha's arguments in Post-Colonial studies amplify that although the practice of colonialism has been literally and politically defeated, or decolonized, the colonial 'hangover' still persists even in the contemporary world and continue to instate colonial biases and affect individual and communal lives. His works are extensively influenced by thinkers and critics like Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michael Foucault and Edward Said. Many critics argue that Bhabha has radicalized the colonial theories and carved a way for an interdisciplinary approach to Post-Colonialism and psychoanalysis.

Some of the major works published by Homi Bhabha include *Nation and Narration* (199), *Location and Culture* (1994), *Cosmopolitanisms in Public Culture*, *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation* (2004), *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives* (1996). Apart from his books, Bhabha has also published countless essays and articles in several reputed journals as well as ventured into translation work. For his immense contribution to the field of literary and political theory, Homi K Bhabha was awarded with the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in the year 2012.

Check Your Progress:

Q. Write a short note on Homi K Bhabha's academic career.

Q. Briefly explain the theory of Post-Colonialism.

10.4 KEY CONCEPTS INTRODUCED BY HOMI K BHABHA

10.4.1 Hybridity

Colonialism as a political practice and a theory is centered on the structure of binaries, where one half of the binary is positioned as superior to the other. This binary structure separates the colonizer and the colonized into two distinct categories with no possibility of intermixing between the two. The colonizers perceived the colonized as an antithesis to them and therefore inferior. With the perspective of a superior, civilized and morally better culture, colonialism set out to be a civilizing mission, where the inferior, savage and evil native cultures must be tamed and suppressed. This 'us versus them' perspective divides the East and the West into two distinct cultures and no similarities between the cultures was thought to be possible. In this discourse, the West is always placed

at the center and is understood as a net positive culture containing the moral and ethical standards as well as authority to impose itself on the East that is placed at the periphery and is understood as a negative of the West, lacking morality or civic senses. Thus, the colonial discourse states that cultures are rigid entities that cannot mix with one another. Rudyard Kipling's famous verse exemplifies this binary structure well, 'East is East, West is West and never the twain shall meet'.

On the other hand, the nationalist movements popularized in the colonies to gain independence and sovereignty from their Colonizers also reaffirms this separatist bias of the colonial discourse. The nationalist movements focused on rebuilding a nation and reclaiming a culture that has been lost because of the colonizers. In this perspective, the native cultures are seen as 'pure' and 'sacred' cultures which have been polluted by the West. Mahatma Gandhi, in his *Hind Swaraj*, urges the people of India to reclaim their past culture, the pre-colonial culture and boycott all that is Western. The pre-colonial culture is considered to be the 'real' culture of the natives. This Eastern culture is also thought to be absolutely different and separate from any influence of the West. Hence, even in the nationalist discourses cultures are thought to be rigid entities that remains separate from one another, despite their constant contact. Post-Colonialism, under Bhabha's influence, challenges this rigidity and 'authenticity' of cultures through the concept of Hybridity of cultures.

Against this perception of pure culture, which can be distinguished and kept separated from other cultures and which can be reverted back to, Homi K Bhabha puts forward the idea of fluidity of cultures. According to Bhabha's Post-Colonial analysis, cultural authenticity is a myth. For Bhabha culture does not have a rigid identity and it cannot be fixed within a specific time and space.

Bhabha perceives culture as not akin to a rigid, solid object. Rather, cultures are fluid and flexible and accommodating. Culture is also perpetually in motion, hence it is a living entity, that is constantly evolving and growing, with the influence of external cultures and traditions. Therefore, the concept of pure and definite 'Indianness' or 'Britishness' etcetera holds no ground as there is no element that is exclusively Indian or British. All cultures are formed due to an intermixing with one another and thus cross-influence is a fact of all cultures. This intermixing is defined as Hybridity of cultures by Homi K Bhabha. Just like the interrelations of distinctive properties form a hybrid identity for the new species, cultures inherently possess such Hybridity.

Evidences to support and justify Bhabha's concept of Hybridity of cultures can be found in various archeological finds of ancient civilizations in places beyond the territorial expanse of the civilization. For instance, there have been several archeological finds that suggests the presence of cross-cultural exchange between the Indus valley civilization and the Mesopotamian civilization. These cultural exchanges, through trade in particular, suggests the cross-cultural influence of one culture over another. According to Bhabha, cultures do not evolve in isolation as separate entities independent of other cultures. Further, the liminal space at the borders of nations and cultures prove this hybrid identity. The cultures practiced at the borders are often amalgamations of two or more cultures simultaneously coexisting in the same space and time. As such, cultures are not only hybridized through space, but also time. The spatial and temporal evolution of cultures is a characteristic feature of hybridization, or intermixing, of culture. Consider the case of India as a nation of diverse cultures. By default, there is no distinct 'Indian' culture that can be isolated and defined. Instead, the 'Indian' culture is marked by its intermixing

and amalgamation of various culture into one melting pot. Even in the pre-colonial era, India had witnessed the mixing of foreign cultures and transforming the native culture into an ever evolving term called 'Indian'. The coming of the Aryans, the Dravidians, the Mongoloids, the Sultanate and the Mughals, all added newer dimensions to what is now understood as the 'Indian' culture. Thus, the colonial influence upon the Indian culture too cannot be simply disregarded. Bhabha's Post-Colonial understanding of the post colonial Indian culture acknowledges the presence of colonial cultural influences on the contemporary culture.

Hybridity of culture nullified the colonial discourse of cultural superiority. Since there is no particular and inherent British essence, the colonizer's culture cannot be understood as a distinct and superior culture who is endowed with the responsibility of 'civilizing the East'. To talk about 'superior Britishness' and 'inferior Indianness' would be to suggest that these cultures have certain fixed, static essences that are separate from one another. However, as Hybridity of culture suggests, cultures are not static or isolated. Thus, with the acknowledgement that there is no inherent British culture, the illusion of colonialism as a civilizing disappears and colonialism is exposed as a form of material exploitation and oppression of the East by the West.

Stop to Consider:

Hybridity of culture refers to intermixing of cultures to state that no culture is actually pure, in true sense of the term. According to Bhabha cultures do not evolve in isolation. Cultures are neither static not rigid. Bhabha suggests that cultures are fluid entities that are constantly evolving due to their contact with other cultures. Cultures are not bound by time and space. Hybridization of culture

does not pollute the culture. Rather, cultures exist due to hybridization. Bhabha suggests that there is no inherent essence in a particular culture that separates it from all other cultures. Thus, the notion of a culture being superior or inferior to other culture is nullified through the concept of Hybridity of cultures.

10.4.2 Mimicry

As stated previously, colonialism found its justification in preaching it as a civilizing mission which would bring civilization to the otherwise savage colonized communities. The colonizer, therefore, is placed at a superior from where he or she must not only judge the natives but also educate them to be like them. In Macaulay's Minutes of 1853 for instance, he states that the colonial administration in India, under the British Raj, must impart education to the native Indians in English language so that they can 'create a class of people, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect'. In other words, the colonizers wanted the colonized to behave more and more like the colonizers. They wanted the colonized to mimic them. In doing so, the colonizers created a desire amongst the colonized to constantly strive to be like the colonizers. The natives of the colonies aspire to be like the colonial West and therefore they attempt to imitate Western behaviour, values and cultural symbols. The problem with imitation, however, is that if this was ever to succeed, it would inevitably erase the authority of the colonizers. In other words, if the colonized natives successfully became like the colonizers, as was intended by the civilizing mission, then the natives would become comparable to the colonizers, or even become their equal, as they now possess the same civic values like the Western, superior colonizers. This paradox would challenge the authority and superior

positioning of the colonizers, as they have become equal. Therefore, Bhabha suggests that the colonizers did not want the colonized natives to fully embody the culture of the colonizers. Or rather, they did not expect the natives to 'catch up' with the West, which was believed to be so far ahead in terms of civilization. Instead, the colonial discourse suggested that the natives must only try to be like the colonizers but never quite succeed and therefore remain 'not quite, not white'. According to Bhabha, the colonized natives are caught in the cycle of distorted mimicry of their colonizers.

Homi Bhabha maintains that all forms of imitation of the 'superior' Western, colonial culture by a 'lesser' colonized native lead to various forms of mimicry. The word 'mimicry' is derived from the Greek word 'mimetikos' which means 'imitative'. However, with time the word itself transformed in its meaning and thus, it no longer signify mere resemblance. The Oxford dictionary definition of the word states, 'the action or skill of imitating someone or something, especially in order to entertain or ridicule'. This implies that the natives' imitation of the colonizers is, in reality, a mockery of the colonizers. According to Bhabha, mimicry is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas. This type of copying distorted the concept of the superior colonizer with a better culture as their culture was now presented in a comical manner by the colonized natives. The same values and cultural symbols that were a matter of pride and reverence for the colonizers became a representation of farcical mimesis. For instance, when a court jester or a clown imitates the gestures of the royals or king in an exaggerated, satirical manner, the person being imitated naturally feel insulted. This, according to Bhabha, the menace of mimicry of the colonizers lie in making caricatures of the colonizers. In this sense, Caliban's attempt at learning Prospero's language in Shakespeare's *Tempest* but only managing to learn 'how to curse'

can be understood as mimicry of the colonizer's language as Prospero is often regarded as a colonizer in Post-Colonial analysis. Bhabha states, 'Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference. (1994:86)'

Traditionally, the practice of mimicry of the colonial West has been seen as matter of shame and embarrassment by the natives of the colonies. The desire to be like the colonizers and subsequent imitation of them was understood as a way of distancing oneself from one's own cultures. Additionally, mimicry of the colonial West also positions the West as an ideal that the natives would want to be like. Thus, earlier Post-Colonial discourses considered mimicry as a form of reaffirming colonial biases and stereotypes. However, Bhabha considers mimicry as an anticolonial weapon. This is so because, a consequence of mimicry is undermining the colonizer's apparently stable identity. Mimicry is, thus, a menace, or a strategy to ensure that the colonial identity itself can be shown in a negative light. The identity of the colonizer is constantly slipping away from their grasp as it is redefined by the colonized natives through mimicry of their speech, language, literature, culture and behaviour. In Homi K Bhabha's Post-Colonial analysis mimicry is a way of taking back the power from the colonizers.

Stop to Consider:

The term mimicry, in Bhabha's Post-Colonial understanding, refers to a form of exaggerated copying of the language, culture and behaviour of the colonial West. Accordingly, mimicry as a practice

originated from the colonial discourse of imposing their 'superior' culture onto the 'inferior' native culture as a part of their civilizing mission. This imposition created a practice of imitation of the West by the colonized natives. However, this is not an identical imitation. Instead, through mimicry the colonizers are presented in a distorted manner, wherein they become victim to a type of comical mockery by the colonized natives. Mimicry is understood as an anticolonial weapon by Homi K Bhabha.

10.4.3 Ambivalence

According to Bhabha's Post-Colonial analysis, cultural Hybridity creates an ambivalent atmosphere for both the colonizer and the colonized, wherein both are compelled to think of their identities in terms of, or in reference to the Other. Bhabha states that ambivalence manifests in the ways the colonizers and the colonized engages with one another, forming complex relationship with each other. Both the colonizer and the colonized are caught in a sense of 'in-betweens' where they simultaneously claim their disgust of the other and try to mimic the other. Thus, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is recognized with a sense of ambivalence by Homi Bhabha.

The Oxford English dictionary defines the term 'ambivalence' as 'the state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone'. The colonizer/colonized relationship lead to the formation of contradictory and rather paradoxical perceptions of the other. Bhabha explores this dynamic in his *Location of Culture*. He maintains that such a complicated dynamic creates a tense tussle between love and hate, oppression and admiration and submission and resistance. Further, it is due to ambivalence that both the colonizer and the colonized can be cannot be understood without the

presence of the other. The hybridization of cultures blurs the boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized.

The ambiguous manner in which the colonizer and the colonized regard one another is ambivalent in Bhabha's analysis. The colonizer considers the colonized natives as simultaneously inferior and yet exotic. The colonizer exerts authority over the natives and in doing so oppresses them and destabilizes their agency and autonomy. At the same time, the colonizer benefits off of the labor, resources and cultural exchanges of the colonizers. This is evident in the globalized use of several inventions, discoveries, practices and intellectual property that was primarily initiated by what is considered the East, or the Orient. For example, the British colonizers ridiculed certain cultural practices of the Indian society, particularly the highly religious traditions, and yet they appropriated the same traditions in the name of exoticism and spirituality like Yoga and Ayurveda. The perception of the colonized native as an 'exotic' subject also constitutes the theory of ambivalence.

On the other hand, the colonized natives' identity is also marked by ambivalence. The colonized subjects simultaneously desires and rejects the colonial power and cultures. The colonized natives perceive their colonizers as both admirable and corrupt. The colonized subjects envy their colonizers yet they detest their own envy. This is evident in the use of colonizer's language, English, by the colonized natives, particularly in literature. The use of English and the societal and political discourses attached to it transform in beyond being just a method of communication to a market of resistance and mimicry. Further, in one's day to day life, the influence of certain cultural symbols and practices can be seen, particularly in the case of fashion and food habits. Thus, the colonized natives often alter between the choice of accepting certain

aspects of the colonial culture and protecting and preserving their own.

Homi Bhabha maintains that ambivalence has a productive as well as positive aspect to it. Ambivalence deconstructs the need for rigid cultural boundaries and identities. Instead it allows cross-cultural exchanges which, in turn, leads to hybridization of culture. Thus, the colonized subjects are not prohibited from or restricted to the practice of certain cultures. In the contemporary, global world where cultural exchange happens at an even rapid pace, ambivalence dismantles the concept of extreme binary structures. As such, a more nuanced conceptualization of cultures and their interplay with each other is possible due to the presence of ambivalent space in between cultural borders.

SAQ:

Q. How does ambivalence, as a result of colonial experiences, influence the ability of the postcolonial subject to negotiate identity and social relationships?

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Q In what ways do postcolonial writers and intellectuals use literature, art, and other forms of expression to explore these experiences of ambivalence and negotiate their place in the world?

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10.4.4 The Third Space

The hybridization of cultures often happens at the periphery of a nation, state or kingdom if the cross-cultural influence is happening

between neighboring communities. However, the process of hybridization, with reference to the colonial experience, creates a liminal space where intermixing occurs not just at the periphery, but also at the center. Homi Bhabha refers to the physical space, or place, where Hybridity is initiated as the Third Space. Bhabha first used this term in his *Location of culture* where he attempted to locate the Post-Colonial cultures and the colonial influence upon them. As such, the Third Space can be defined as a place cultural collision is facilitated. 'It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.' (Bhabha).

Bhabha maintains that the Third Space is not just the physical space of contact between various cultures. It is, in actuality, the space from where newer, hybrid cultures evolve, after their collision. Bhabha suggests that the Third Space is a witness to and evidence of the resistance and authority of the native cultures. This is the metaphorical space where colonialism, on its mission to influence and 'civilize' the natives, failed in absolute assimilation of the native culture into the colonial one, leaving spaces for negotiation and reclamation of agency. Bhabha cites the example of converting a group of Indian villagers into Christianity in Delhi in 1817. The villagers resist on the grounds on vegetarianism. Such examples of subtle resistance and negotiation with the colonial culture exists throughout various colonies across the world. Christianity, for instance, had undergone several types of transformation to incorporate certain aspects of certain pre-existing native cultures into the dominant Western religious discourse, in such Third Spaces where hybridization between cultures occurred. In Bhabha's analysis, the Third Space is a subversive space where the colonial

cultures enter into dialogic negotiation with the native cultures. ‘The third space is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts.’ (Bhabha).

Check Your Progress:

- Q. What is Hybridity of cultures, according to Bhabha?
- Q. How does mimicry subvert the colonial discourse of a superior West and an inferior East?
- Q. Why does Homi Bhabha perceive ambivalence as positive?
- Q. What is the Third Space, according to Homi K Bhabha?

10.5 BHABHA’S NOTION OF THE ‘NATION’

The concept of a Nation forms a pivotal part of the decolonization movements in colonies across the world. The development of a Nation as a static identifying state with definite geographical boundaries, cultures, language and ethnicity, in itself, is an European concept that flourished mostly with the advent of materialistic colonial pursuit and the industrial revolution. Defining the Nation in such rigid terms became essential to distinguish and thereby separate one group of people from another and enable competition between the two. Similarly, the development of the idea of a Nation had played a crucial role in the unification of the colonized natives under a shared experience of oppression in the hands of the exploitative colonizers. Hence, the idea of a Nation can be understood as a socially constructed concept to facilitate decolonization. Nation building, therefore, is one of the first signs of nationalist movements. The earlier phenomenon of various small

kingdoms and estates co-existing in a shared geographical landmass became archaic and redundant. Instead, a widely applicable, political, economic and social construction of a Nation became detrimental due to the colonial experience. Thus, Post-Colonialism had typically regarded Nation building as a positive, revolutionary movement towards decolonization. Homi Bhabha contradicts this well-defined, static and stable construct of the Nation. As such, Bhabha attempts to shift the Nationalist narrative into a more fluid and multi-dimensional one, where the Nation escapes the rigidity of a fixed structure.

Bhabha builds on the concept of narration and Nation proposed by Benedict Anderson in his seminal text *Imagined Communities* (1983). He states that like narratives, the concept of a Nation is also a carefully crafted and systematically chosen plot that contains particularly the dominant community's perspective. In this carefully crafted narrative of the Nation, the histories, cultures and socio-political issues that do not fit into the story are systematically rejected. Thus, the minorities and the historically marginalized communities are excluded from the narration of the Nation in which they have lived for a long period of time. The narration of Nation, or rather the construct of Nation, is therefore a matter of choice and of precedence of one aspect over the other. Any deviant from the dominant narrative becomes the outcaste. That is why, the construction of the Nation signifies an inevitable end of the free flowing cultural Hybridity, which is determined by its fluidity. 'The linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes, most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity. However, the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the

effects of the ambivalence of then 'nation' as a narrative strategy. ' (Bhabha).

On the other hand, the construction of the narrative of the Nation also center around the process of othering. The nationalist movements create the binary structure of 'Us' and 'Them', where 'Us' include the communities and people who adhere to the narrative of the Nation that is being created and 'Them' include the others, the outsiders, the communities which do not fall into the narrative. This structure of the Other further reinforce the colonial biases that were already in place. In this binary of Us/Them, often the counter cultural forces within the geopolitical area are also regarded as the nationalist rejects, or the Other. Thus, the concept of the Nation is criticized by Bhabha for being the created narrative of the majority and the erasure of the minority and marginalized narratives. For Bhabha, the Nation as an eternal entity which has a stable and definite origin, or signified, is false. The signification of the concept of the Nation constantly lead to different signifiers. Bhabha insists that popular cultures such as arts, literature, media and music participates in the formation of the Nation as a specific entity. To elucidate, the concept of India as a Nation emerged oy during the nationalist movements of the late 19th century and early 20th century. Prior to the colonial experience and the subsequent exploitation experienced by the people, the idea of India as a Nation did not exist. Through the composition of songs like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 'Vande Mataram' and paintings, literature and sculptors of the Bharat Mata, the nationalist movements un India crafted the concept of India as a Nation-state.

SAQ:

Q. How do we define a nation's "people," and who gets to be included or excluded? Are there objective criteria for membership, or is it based on subjective factors like culture or ideology?

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Q. Compare Bhabha's take on the narrative construction of the Nation and Salman Rushdie's statement of people being exiled from the nationhood. How does the issue of diaspora fit into the narrative of the Nation?

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10.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, you have been introduced to one of the most significant theorists and critics of Post-Colonial studies, Homi K Bhabha. You have had a brief overview of the life of the theorist and have understood various influences and experiences that might have shaped his political, literary and philosophical theories. Further, you have also learnt about some of the basic concepts proposed by Bhabha through his publications. You read about his theories on hybridity of cultures and mimicry as a Post-Colonial weapon against Colonial biases. You have also read through the theorist's take on the presence of ambivalence as a part of Post-Colonial subjecthood and Bhabha's theory of the Third Space. Finally, you have gone through the theorist's take on the concept of the creation of a Nation through narrativisation of the majority culture and then you have understood his criticism of the same. After reading this unit, you are now able to

explain the complexity and fluidity of subjecthood in the Post-Colonial reality.

10.7. MODAL QUESTIONS

1. How does hybridity of cultures shape Post-Colonial identities?
2. How does the concept of hybridity challenge traditional notions of cultural boundaries and national identities?
3. How does mimicry contribute to the construction of colonial power, and how can it also be a form of subversion or resistance?
4. How does Bhabha's concept of ambivalence challenge the binary oppositions of colonial discourse, such as colonizer/colonized, master/slave, and self/other?
5. What is the significance of the "third space" as a site of cultural negotiation and hybridity, and how does it disrupt the dominant narratives of colonialism?
6. How does Bhabha's work illuminate the ways in which colonialism continues to shape contemporary cultural and political landscapes?
7. Discuss how Bhabha's theories can be applied to postcolonial literature. Use examples from specific texts.

10.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Links:

- https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homi_K._Bhabha
- <https://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/bhabha/bhabha1.html>
- <https://www.the-criterion.com/the-location-of-culture-homi-k-bhabhas-new-methodology-of-cultural-analysis/>
- <https://blog.degruyter.com/diaspora-and-home-interview-homi-k-bhabha/>
- <https://philonotes.com/2023/06/homi-k-bhabhas-philosophy-hybridity-cultural-identity-and-postcolonial-theory>

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UNIT- 11

HOMI K BHABHA: DISSEMINATION: TIME, NARRATIVE AND THE MARGINS OF THE MODERN NATION

Unit Structure:

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objectives

11.3 A Brief Introduction to the Theorist

11.4 Reading the Text

11.5 Summing Up

11.6 Modal Questions

11.7 References and Suggested Readings

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Post-Colonialism as a field of study emerged as a response to the European colonial discourses that was centralized upon establishing superiority of the White, European West and inferiority of the Non-European East. Post-Colonial studies aim to deconstruct certain socio-political structures that fuel the binary subjugation of the colonized natives. As such, all discourses which enable the dominance of a certain community over the other came to be challenged under Post-Colonialism. One of the most prominent theorists who contributed in this deconstruction of colonial discourse is Homi K Bhabha. Bhabha's expansive work on Post-Colonial subjecthood and reality analyses and scrutinizes the rigid and static social institutions that limit the fluid growth of cultures. He asserts upon the importance of the colonized natives taking back not only the power, but also the rhetoric from their colonizers. Bhabha attempts to rewrite the predominant narratives of nations to

emphasize on the marginalized perspectives and voices. In his Post-Colonial analysis, Homi Bhabha vouches for a more inclusive and flexible narrative of the nation. His essay entitled ‘Dissemi Nation : Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation’ was first published in 1990 as a part of his book *Nation and Narration*. It is a comprehensive text which elucidates Bhabha’s subversive take of the narrativisation of nation. Thus text has been regarded as one of the seminal texts in understanding Post-Colonial perspective on nation and culture and it has been a part of the syllabus for literary and cultural studies in universities across the world. Bhabha’s text had inspired several critics, theorists and activists across the world in various multidisciplinary fields of study. Further, the concept of the Nation, as understood through the perspective of European enlightenment, came to be challenged due to this text.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be introduced to one of the most important essays written by Homi K Bhabha entitled, ‘DissemiNation : Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation’. You will go through a brief introduction to Homi K Bhabha as a Post-Colonial theorist. You will learn about Bhabha’s definition of the Nation and its construction through the nationalist movements in the colonies. Further, you will learn about the differential temporality of various communities within the so-called Nation, as identified by the theorist. You will also learn about the communities in the margins and their dual existence. After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *explain* Bhabha’s concept of narrativisation of the nation;
- *analyze* the process of hybridization and the Third Space in the construction of a Post-Colonial Nation;

- *understand* the theory ambivalence as proposed by Bhabha;
- *explain* the practical manifestation of Bhabha's notion of mimicry in the formation of the Nation.

11.3 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORIST

Homi K Bhabha is regarded as one of the leading voices in Post-Colonial studies. His works have been highly influential in the process of redefining nationhood, and the Post-Colonial identity formation. Bhabha was born into a Parsi family in the year 1949 in Bombay, India. He had received his school education from St. Mary's High school in Mazagaon in Mumbai. Being a Mumbai born and bred, Bhabha grew up with a strong influence of Indian culture. At the same time, as a citizen of the recently independent and sovereign country, he had to grapple with the question of identity and the residual colonial discourses right from his early childhood days. Thus, Post-Colonial identity and all its indications had been a question pertaining to not just his nation, but also his personal life. Bhabha had completed his graduation with the Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Mumbai following which he left India to pursue his higher education. He had received his post graduation degree with Master of Arts and later an M. Phil and the D. Phil from Christ Church College under Oxford University, UK. Thus, ironically it is his experience in the erstwhile colonial state which influenced his theory of hybrid identities with contradictory cultures and values.

After receiving his doctorate degree from Oxford University, he continued to stay in the UK for more than a decade. He first joined in as a lecturer in the department of English in the University of Sussex, where he remained as a faculty member for ten years. Following this lectureship, Bhabha had received a fellowship

position in the Princeton University, where he also was also made the Old Dominion visiting professor. Bhabha had maintained several such faculty positions in many universities across the UK and the US, solidifying himself as one of the most influential educators of the contemporary times. Some examples of this include, his position as the Steinberg visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania where he delivered the Richard Wright lecture series and his position as the faculty fellow in the school of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth College. Furthermore, Bhabha served as the Chester D professor in humanities at the University of Chicago from 1997 to 2001 and a visiting professor at the University college, London in the year 2001-02. Bhabha had also been the Anne F Rothemberg professor of English and American literature and language at Harvard University since 2001. He also serves on the Editorial Collective of Public Culture, an academic journal published by Duke University Press.

Bhabha's contribution to the field of Post-Colonial studies have been immense. He challenging concepts like Hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and the third space reflects the colonized natives way if resistance and defiance of the dominant European colonial discourses. His theories center on the notion that the dominance of Colonial powers is because of the assertion of difference in their culture to that of the colonized natives and that the resistance of it comes from understanding that there are no static empirical differences in cultures at all. Rather, cultures are formed because of intermixing and not separation. Thus, the colonial discourse, in Bhabha's theories, is revealed as nothing but the process of material exploitation of the natives.

In his first book *Nation and Narration* Bhabha argued for de-essentializing the concept of nationhood. He stated that both the colonial powers and the colonized natives exclusively focused on

the presentation of a homogenized national identity, a firm of nationhood which was carefully crafted and made into a narrative. Bhabha challenges this idea of the Nation as the unified homogenized whole on the grounds of discrimination and subsequent erasure of the narratives of the marginalized communities within the said Nation. In his seminal text *Location of Cultures*, which is a compilation of some of his most important essays, Bhabha primarily argues that Western philosophical and political discourses polarize the world into the binaries of 'Us' and 'Them'. Although, according to the theorist, such binary separation between cultures and communities is not possible, or based on truth, as cultures are not static entities, fixed in its forms. Instead, cultures are dynamic, living entities which are constantly evolving due to its interaction with other cultures. As such, there was no pure West or pure East, to begin with. Thus, Bhabha's Post-Colonial ideas most propose the concept of fluid, heterogeneous cultures and identities, which are not spatially and temporally fixed. He advocates for the free flow of culture and communication between them. He is the theorist of the 'in-betweens'. His works are influenced by critics like Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, Franz Fanon and Michel Foucault. His works are inspired by Derrida's concept of deconstruction, in which he deconstructs colonial discourses.

Some of the major works published by Homi Bhabha include *Nation and Narration* (1999), *Location and Culture* (1994), *Cosmopolitanisms in Public Culture*, *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation* (2004), *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives* (1996). Apart from his books, Bhabha has also published countless essays and articles in several reputed journals as well as ventured into translation work. For his immense contribution to the field of literary and political theory, Homi K Bhabha was

awarded with the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in the year 2012.

Check Your Progress:

Q. What are some of Homi K. Bhabha's major works?

Q. What was Bhabha's primary argument in his book *Nation and Narration*?

11.4. READING THE TEXT

11.4.1 The Time of the Nation

At the beginning of his essay, Homi K. Bhabha states that the title of his essay has been inspired by the theories of Jacques Derrida as well as his own experience of migration. He maintains that he had witnessed a segregation of communities during the time that should have been marked by what he called 'various types of gatherings'. The formation of a homogenized identity of the Nation, even in the European countries, is, ironically, characterized by this same form of segregation because of the process of migration. Bhabha states that the formation of the 'ubiquitous' notion of the Nation, during the industrial revolution in Europe, is based more on temporality than on history of the people. As such, the migration of people became the underlying phenomenon during the construction of the overarching theme of the Western Nation. The aim of the essay, as stated by Bhabha, is to identify various narrativisation and discursivity that forms a Nation. Bhabha focuses on temporality of the construction of the Nation because he states that it is a more inclusive look at the Nation than historicism. This is because historicism, that has become the dominant narrative of Nationhood, that is, the coming together of the nation because of historical event, deliberately

sidelines the communities, cultures and smaller histories that do not fit into the larger narratives. Certain minority and marginalized communities that do not fit into the dominant narrative of 'the Nation' or 'the People' suffer from, what Bhabha calls 'a continual slippage' into analogues' from the narrativisation of the Nation.

Bhabha takes on Edward Said's concept of secular interpretation to state that a horizontal understanding of the Nation, based on the geographical expands of the country, is not an accurate way of understanding the National narrative. He states that the horizontal perspective on Nation further implies that there must be a singular origin, the eternal signified, from where the Nation must have emerged. However, such singularity of origin, the particular place from where the Nation started to take shape, emphasize upon a linear narrative of history. Instead, Bhabha states that the Nation must be understood in terms of the temporality. He argues that the concept of the Nation, as a modern creation, is stuck in the 'doubleness' of time, in which, the modern time of the Nation is seen as a homogenized, autonomous entity which simultaneously reflects the past from where the Nation origins, the past that is also written and visualized in modern times. 'To write the story of the Nation demands that we articulate the archaic ambivalence that informs modernity' (Bhabha). He maintains that the concept of the modern Nation is based on the idea of 'many as one' wherein communities based on race, gender and class are treated as totalitarian entities having a homogenized subjecthood. Further, Bhabha uses Bakhtin's analysis of Goethe's work to elucidate his theory of the double presence of Nation-time and space. Bakhtin states that Goethe's representation of the daily toiling of the life forms the narrative of Italian nationalism that reflects the present time as mirror to the archaic, ideal and all encompassing life of the Italians in the past. In this perspective, the ghost of the past then

must guide the present and a double narrative of Nation exists simultaneously. Bhabha interprets this analysis through the Freudian concept of the uncanny, in which the past gets redoubled into the present creating a type of ambivalence. This ghostly presence of the past is a form of doubling the self itself.

To exemplify this 'doubleness' of temporality, Bhabha uses the presents the diametrically opposed views of master and slaves in John Barrell's analysis of the 'English Gentleman' and Huston Baker's analysis of the Negro during the Harlem Renaissance. Barrell maintains that the conceptualization of a common national identity was deliberately fixed upon the a certain kind of representation that ignored the margins and deviants like the idea of the common language spoken by the gentleman population, a language that was common to all but was not first language of any. On the other hand, Baker's description of 'radical maroonage', which was the insurgent, Afro-American expressive culture during the Harlem Renaissance, also shows that it was centered around constant decentering or migration of the community. Through these examples, Bhabha proves that there is a conscious doubling in the narration of the Nation, where people are thought of, in the present time, as writing or acting the narrative, and yet they are also perceived as a historical 'object' which would signify the ideal in the future.

Stop to Consider:

Ambivalence is a kind of mixed feeling that colonizers and the colonized have towards one another. The colonizer and the colonized regard each other through a complex perspective in which they oscillate between love and hatred, disgust and admiration. The colonizer both oppresses the colonized natives and yet they must use

their labor, resources and culture. Similarly, the colonized natives consider the colonizer as corrupt and yet they envy them and desire to mimic them. This oscillation between contradictory feelings is called ambivalence.

11.4.2 The Space of the People

In this section of this essay, Homi K Bhabha focuses on the two competing ways of imagining the Nation, implying that the Nation and the people constituting the Nation are not a stable, specific entity. These two competing narrative imaginations are the pedagogical Nation and the performative Nation. The collective representation of the people does include the individualistic, sometimes contradictory, representation of the people. Here, the pedagogical understanding of the people of a Nation may have conflicts with the actual people, with their individualistic opinions, cultures and values. 'People are neither the beginning nor the end of the National narrative; they represent cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify more specific address to contentious unequal interests and identities within the population' (Bhabha). Quoting Claude Lefort, Bhabha emphasizes upon the 'split' between the pedagogical representation and the performative representation of the people, and by extension, the Nation.

Bhabha states that the 'split' occurs as the narrative construction of the Nation takes place which centers the narrative around the *a priori*, pedagogical image of the people of the created past, which the people of the present must perform and encapsulate, thereby, doubling the self in the image of the pedagogical representation. The pedagogical, thus, become the tradition of the people, a designation of itself. The pedagogical signification of the Nation represents an

‘image’ of the people for self-generation as well as to set up distinctions between the Nation and the Other. While, the performative representation of the Nation breaches the binaries of self and other by placing itself in the ‘in-betweens’. This creates the double-writing of dissemi-Nation of the Nation where the pedagogical, ideal version of the people is written alongside the performative, day-to-day, contradictory versions of the same. Bhabha maintains that his proposed theory of double narratives of the Nation follow Raymond Williams crucial distinction between residual and emergent practices in oppositional cultures, which maintains that there must be a liminal space where the ideal, dominant narrative of culture meets its contradictory, residual cultures that do not fit into the narrative.

Bhabha insists that for each dominant narrative of the Nation, there is a continuous evocation and forgetting of the counter-narratives which resists the totalizing powers of the dominant narrative. The unity of the Nation, at least politically, Bhabha insists, depends on the displacement of subjectivity of plural narratives, that form various cultures, into a singular archaic, pedagogical, idealistic narrative that is commonly imposed as tradition. ‘Quite simply, the difference of space returns as the sameness of time, turning territory into tradition, turning people into one’ (Bhabha). The space of the people, which is diverse, is discarded for the temporality of tradition which can be superimposed as the dominant narrative of the Nation. Bhabha elucidates this through the lens of Freud’s concept of ‘narcissism of minor differences’. The tensions that exists within the cultures of the Nation that are aggressively pushed into a homogenized narrative, is projected outwards onto the Others. The liminal space of the people, where the pedagogy and performative coexist, becomes a space of constant reinforcement of totality and the rebellious display of individualism. Bhabha therefore maintains

that the people are ‘split’ into double narrative and constantly oscillate between the two.

Stop to Consider:

In Homi K. Bhabha’s framework, pedagogy refers to the structured, institutionalized transmission of knowledge, often associated with the grand narratives of history, nation, and culture. It represents the authoritative, stable, and official discourse that seeks to define identity in a fixed way. Pedagogy is linked to the way nations and institutions construct a unified historical narrative, presenting “the people” as a continuous and homogeneous entity

In contrast, the performative challenges the fixity of pedagogical narratives by emphasizing the dynamic, contingent, and interactive nature of identity formation. The performative is rooted in repetition, contestation, and improvisation, allowing for the rearticulation of meaning through everyday cultural and social practices. It disrupts official histories by highlighting how “the people” are not a singular, unified entity but an ever-evolving, fragmented collective that constantly negotiates its identity.

11.4.3. Of Margins and Minorities

Bhabha builds on Franz Fanon’s text *On National Culture* which argues against the intellectual articulation of the Nation as a homogenized, linear and chronological narrative. ‘Culture abhors simplification’, as such, a diverse narratives that coexist within the space of the Nation cannot, or rather, should not be grouped into a readable, pristine and coherent narrative because doing so negates the very idea of culture. ‘The present of the people’s history, then, is a practice that destroys the constant principles of national culture

that attempts to hark back to a 'true' national past which is often represented in the form of realism and stereotypes', Bhabha insists. Post-Colonialism, according to Bhabha, adhere to this implicit critique of the National culture, thereby insisting upon a critique of the homogenized, linear narrative of the Western national culture as well. On the other hand, Julia Kristeva's take on the women's time further add to the insistence on not recording, and therefore fixing, the narrative in a particular story. Kristeva states that the national culture insists upon being the common denominator that defines the overarching culture of the Nation. However, the lived experiences of the people, the performative is different, sometimes oppositional, to the general understanding of the culture. This performative culture of people is a form of resistance to the symbolic order of National culture. Further, Bhabha uses Derrida's concept of the okay of supplementation to state that the National narrative is formed by supplementing one signifier, one aspect of culture, with another, the archaic, ideal version of the same. Supplementarity, Bhabha maintains, accumulates multiple layers of narratives of the present, forming an incoherent mess that cannot be simplified into a singular, linear narrative. Bhabha states that the narrative of the Nation is filled with such 'double entendres', which constantly disrupts the sought after simple explanation of the Nation. Bhabha, further, insists that it is this supplementary narrative that contains the narrative of the minorities and the marginalized.

The marginal narratives adds after the discourse of the Nation and not 'add up to it'. What this means is that the narratives, voices and cultures of the people at the margins do not function to fill up the whole, that is the national discourse. Instead, the presence of marginal narratives prove that the national discourse was never a coherent whole, to begin with. 'The supplementary strategy interrupts the successive seriality of the narrative plurals or

pluralism by radically changing their mode of articulation' (Bhabha). The theorist maintains, therefore, that the minority narratives does not just perform as an antithesis to the dominant, majority narrative. Instead, the minority narratives redefine the narrative of the Nation itself. In other words, the minority narratives are not a passive recipient of the dominant culture, constantly defining itself in terms of the dominant narrative. The minority narratives are active participants in the propagation as well as the ceaseless questioning of the National narrative. Thus, the culture that is present in the periphery becomes the sole reason for not defining, and thereby fixing, the national discourse as an singular, idealized, homogeneous sequencing of various events. The minority and marginalized cultures of the nation disrupt the concept of a singular Nation. Bhabha uses the 1980s film *Handsworth Songs* to exemplify his theory of the incoherence of minority narratives. 'The minority discourse sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic *in-between* of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy' (Bhabha).

Check Your Progress:

Q. How does Bhabha define the 'doubleness' of national narrative?

Q. How do minority and marginalized narratives counteract in the singular national discourse?

11.4.4 Social Anonymity and Cultural Anomie

The discourse of the Nation emerged, as Benedict Anderson puts it in his *Imagined Communities*, in the narrative of the 'meanwhile', which separates the reality from the language. By fixing the reality, which is diverse and incoherent, into a linguistic structure of

narration, the Nation as a discourse functions like a realist novel, which possess the question of ‘and then what happened?’. Bhabha states that unlike such iteration of the Nation in language, the reality of the nation construction does not have such synchronized temporality. Instead, the Nation is the space of what Benedict Anderson refers to as unisonance where, like an Aleph, everything exists all at once. If that is so, then how does the national narrative even form? How does this incoherence of the space of people get transformed into a singular, coherent narrative of time which has a definite past that is the ideal peak of imagined traditions, present that actually tries to replicate the past and a future where the ideal glorious past must be regained?

Bhabha takes on Renan’s argument that the narrative of the Nation actually centers around the ‘will’ of the people and not around any particular community, culture or race. The people willingly bind themselves into a particular narrative that would be the Nation. It also implies that the people must have the willingness to accommodate to whatever is the national narrative, for the sake of a patriotic unity of the Nation. This means that people must be willing to also abandon some of their cultural significations to fit into the narrative.

Bhabha maintains that the narrative of the Nation is dependent on this abandonment act that the minority cultures perform to present the illusion of a singular narrative of the Nation. He states that the people are ‘obliged to forget’ their cultures. This obligation to forget is imposed upon the minorities and the marginalized. The minorities and the marginalized, therefore, must maintain anonymity so that the coherent narrative of the Nation is made possible. ‘To be obliged to forget –in the construction of national present –is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs problematic totalization of the national will’ (Bhabha).

Thus, in order to narrate the Nation, there is a systematic erasure of minority narratives, cultures and communities under the guise of the obligation to be socially anonymous.

Stop to Consider:

Social anonymity refers to the invisibility or erasure of certain groups within the national narrative. In postcolonial societies, migrants, minorities, and marginalized communities often find themselves in a paradoxical position: they are physically present within the nation but socially and politically ignored or excluded.

Bhabha suggests that modern nations create a myth of cultural homogeneity, presenting “the people” as a singular, unified body. However, in reality, many individuals and communities do not fully belong to this imagined national identity. Migrants, refugees, and racialized minorities, for example, often exist in a state of social anonymity—their contributions to society are necessary, yet their cultural presence is either suppressed or framed as foreign and temporary.

11.4.5 Cultural Differences

Bhabha presents a distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference in the formation of the Nation. While cultural diversity implies the existence of diverse cultures within the singular narrative of the Nation, cultural difference implies that the difference between various subversive cultures, communities and people are not, by themselves, singular empirical entity either. Cultural diversity assumes that cultures are themselves static, stable entities with a definite origin. It focuses on the essence of the culture, which is diametrically opposed to other cultures. However,

such essential view of culture situates culture within a specific time and space. Bhabha, on the other hand, states that cultures are dynamic, living entities with no specific origin or structure. Instead, cultures are formed by intermixing of different elements and therefore hybridity is an intrinsic part of culture. Cultural diversity emphasizes on the pedagogical approach in which culture is treated as something that is contained within specific time and place and is definable. Paradoxically, cultural difference understands culture in its performative representation which implies that cultures are fluid, heterogeneous and negotiable. 'Cultural difference must not be understood as the free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogeneous empty time of the national community' (Bhabha). Bhabha challenges the existence of harmonious totalities of various cultures within the national narrative. Instead, he focuses on the differences of social lives of the people which cannot be grouped into a harmonious, coherent, definable culture. Further, he states that cultural difference functions not just on juxtaposition of one with another, but also on supplementing one after another. The addition of various cultural differences adds to the entire national narrative, however, it does not 'add up to' the summation of it. This implies that there exists various subversive differences if cultures which dismantle the overall theory of the Nation itself. Cultural difference aims to re-articulate the national narrative from the perspective of subaltern lenses, which had not been taken into consideration earlier. Against the representation of fullness of culture, that is cultural diversity, cultural difference is found where there is a 'loss' of meaning making within the national narrative. This implies that cultures cannot be defined in terms of some pre-given origins from where cultures evolve in a linear pattern. Rather, it is the hybridization of culture that forms facilitates the very existence of culture.

Bhabha maintains that there is an insistence on the creation of the myth that cultures are linear. This myth helps in the construction of the narrative of the Nation. However, these myths is challenged by cultural difference which disrupts the linearity of the narrative. Marginalize groups, minorities, subversive practices or even cultures which are assumed to be taboo, challenges the dominant rhetoric of the Nation, creating hybrid identities. Migration of people, interaction with other cultures, displacement of people within the nation, practice of subversive narratives, are all different ways in which the dominant ideological and cultural narrative of the Nation is challenged and thereby dismantled. Bhabha, therefore, sees cultures as living entities, forever growing because of its collision with other cultures, whilst having no specific origin. Cultures do not have boundaries, in Bhabha's understanding of the Nation.

Stop to Consider:

Hybridity refers to the process by which cultures interact and influence each other, creating new, mixed identities rather than preserving a rigid division between colonizer and colonized, or native and foreign. Bhabha argues that no culture exists in isolation; instead, cultures are shaped through encounters with others, leading to hybrid forms of language, identity, and expression. This challenges traditional colonial thinking, which often framed cultural exchanges as a one-way process in which colonized people simply absorbed the dominant (European) culture. Instead, Bhabha's hybridity suggests that colonized subjects actively reinterpret and transform dominant cultural norms, creating something new and subversive.

11.4.6 The Foreignness of Languages

Within the framework of his deconstruction of the narrative of the nation, Homi Bhabha speaks about the ‘foreignness of languages’, implying that languages, like cultures, are not homogeneous, static entities owned, or created by a particular group of people. Bhabha’s take on language aligns with Jacques Derrida’s challenge to the structurality of linguistic sign through the process of deconstruction. Language, for Bhabha, is not a site of neutrality. It is instead a space for hybridity, negotiation and power struggles between various groups of people.

Bhabha utilizes the example of the Turks, to state that at the core of any language, there is displacement, or a metaphor, which signifies the ‘in-betweens’ of one signifier and the next. Languages are acquired through these displacements of meanings. The displaced meanings are then repeated constantly to ultimately be imposed over another language. Repetition forms the primary part of language acquisition. Bhabha mostly focuses on the experience of the migrants who are forced to learn the language of the foreigners because of their displacement. Their need to learn the language aligns with their feeling of alienation in a foreign land, with foreign culture. Further, Bhabha insists that this foreignness of language also subverts the concept of the dominant language in the national rhetoric. In the colonial and post colonial discourses, language plays a crucial role in the shaping of national identity. Colonial powers impose their language as a part of their colonial rule to position their European languages on top of the linguistic hierarchy. On the other hand, the colonial language imposition on the native is also a form of displacement of the language itself as the European languages are made to function within the signifiers of the Non-European signified. This is a way of creating a cycle *heim* for the colonials who are now displaced from their European homes. Bhabha sites the

example of a dialogue uttered in Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* 'The trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas so they don't know what it means'.

Bhabha maintains that the linguistic displacement creates a sense of 'unhomeliness' within the language systems. Post-Colonial subjects are forced to take on their colonizers' language, or mimic them. The acquisition of the language however is just another form of mimicry. So the Post-Colonial subjects are only limited to a type of comical mockery of their colonizers. They can speak their colonizers' tongue, yet can never be them. Therefore, the belongingness does not exist for them within the language system, creating a sense of unhomeliness. The colonial subjects are reduced to the repetition of mere imitation of their colonizers' language, which is foreign to them. The dilemma of language creates an identity crisis where the Post-Colonial subjects do not feel like they belong to either the dominant narrative or the marginalized one. Bhabha, further, insists that lack of linguistic harmony also is a reflection of the unstable narrative of the Nation. The struggle with the national language and the subsequent presence of multiple other languages within the same Nation exemplifies that there exists no unitary, symbolic narrative that applies to all.

Bhabha maintains that the resistance to colonial discourses are done through literature and language. The artists, critics and authors destabilize the colonial binaries by using the colonizers' language and re-presenting it with subversive perspective. The hybridity of language implies that the colonized subjects do not merely use or imitate the colonizers' language, but also reshape it in the process. This anti-colonial practice is often termed as 'talking back in their own language'. The mimicry that the colonized subjects perform in terms of language creates hybrid manifestations

of it. To exemplify, the Creole and Pidgin linguistic systems use intermix elements of different languages to form new meanings. On the other hand, the colonized subjects who practices their vernacular languages along with the colonizers' language often incorporate words and phrases of their mother tongues into the colonial languages, particularly English. And Post-Colonial writers often write in the colonizers' language but redefine it to make it their own. In this regard, Bhabha extensively focuses on Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* to exemplify various ways in which the author uses the foreignness of language as a tool of resistance. Thus, in Bhabha's understanding, language becomes a form of resistance disrupting the colonizers' authority over the language and ultimately hybridizing it.

Finally, Bhabha concludes his essay by mentioning the problematics of the city-space, in the section title 'The English Weather'. Bhabha states that the colonizers' space provides a representation of contradictions that exists within the dominant narrative. The English Weather' invokes memories of the European landscape and the gloomy weather, whilst simultaneously situating itself as a contradiction to the landscape of the colonies across the world. In the colonial discourse, the landscape and weather of the colonies are perceived as harsh and savage. Interestingly, the migrant population to Europe deconstruct this binary of the superior European landscape and the inferior Non-European space, by looking at the city (London) through the gaze of disgust. The Post-Colonial authors like Rushdie or Fanon have rewritten the proverbial colonial cities as grotesque and hybrid, thereby restructuring colonial discourses.

SAQ:

Q. If hybridity is a form of resistance, does it also risk becoming a new form of cultural appropriation? Who gets to define the boundaries of cultural mixing?

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Q. How is Bhabha's take of DissemiNation similar or distinct from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*?

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Q. Does the performative nature of national identity suggest that all political and cultural authority is inherently unstable?

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11.5. SUMMING UP

In this unit, you have gone through one of the most significant texts in Post-Colonial studies, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and Margins of the Modern Nation', written by Homi K Bhabha. You have learnt about Bhabha's concept of Nation as a narrative in which the identity of the Nation is carefully constructed through exclusion of cultures, communities and people that do not fit into the narrative. You have then analyzed the various ways in which this exclusion occurs. You have also learnt about the differences in the pedagogical and performative representation of the people within the national narrative. Further, you have understood that cultures are

not static entities and therefore a steady and linear narrative of any culture is not possible. Finally, you have gone through the details of the problematics of language as a singular, homogeneous entity. You have, therefore, successfully deconstructed the colonial discourse of the singular Nation.

11.6 MODAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain Homi K. Bhabha's concept of dissemiNation and how it challenges traditional notions of national identity.
2. How does Bhabha differentiate between the pedagogical and the performative aspects of the nation? Illustrate with examples.
3. Discuss the role of migration, diaspora, and marginal voices in shaping national identity according to Bhabha's theory of dissemiNation.
4. Analyze the connection between Bhabha's concept of dissemiNation and his ideas on hybridity and cultural difference.
5. Examine the role of language in the process of dissemiNation. How does the 'foreignness of language' contribute to the hybrid nature of identity?
6. Discuss the political and ethical implications of Bhabha's theory of dissemiNation in relation to globalization and nationalism
7. What is the difference between cultural diversity and cultural difference in Bhabha's framework?

11.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Links :

- https://www.ricorso.net/rx/library/criticism/guest/Bhabba_H/Bhabba_H2.htm
- <https://post45.org/2020/05/the-nation-we-knew-after-homi-bhabhas-dissemination/>
- <https://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/perloff/bhabha.html>
- <https://literariness.org/tag/dissemination/>

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UNIT- 12

INTRODUCTION TO EDWARD SAID

Unit Structure:

- 12.1 Objectives**
- 12.2 Introduction**
- 12.3 Major Works**
- 12.4 Key Concepts**
- 12.5 Critical Reception and Legacy**
- 12.6 Summing Up**
- 12.7 References and Suggested Reading**

12.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will discuss:

- Said's biographical and intellectual background;
- the major texts and key concepts that Said worked with;
- Said's legacy and impact;
- the reception of Said's theories by critics.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

Edward Wadie Said (1935-2003) was a Palestinian-American scholar, literary critic, and public intellectual whose work profoundly influenced postcolonial studies, literary theory, and cultural criticism. Born on November 1, 1935, in Jerusalem to a Palestinian Christian family, Said spent his early years in Jerusalem and Cairo. He received his education at Victoria College in Cairo

and later attended Northfield Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in English from Princeton University in 1957 and subsequently obtained his Master of Arts (1960) and Doctor of Philosophy (1964) in English Literature from Harvard University.

In 1963, Said began his long tenure at Columbia University as a professor of English and Comparative Literature, a position he held until his passing in 2003. His academic pursuits were diverse, encompassing literature, music, and political commentary. Said was an accomplished pianist and served as the music critic for *The Nation*. His interdisciplinary approach allowed him to traverse various fields, making significant contributions to each.

Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), is a critical analysis of the Western study of Eastern societies. In this book, he argues that Western scholarship often portrays Eastern cultures as static and undeveloped, thereby facilitating a sense of Western superiority and justifying colonial ambitions. This work laid the foundation for postcolonial studies and challenged scholars to reconsider their perspectives on non-Western societies. Building upon the ideas presented in *Orientalism*, Said published *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993. In this collection of essays, he examines the relationship between culture and empire, analyzing how literature from authors like Jane Austen and Joseph Conrad reflects and perpetuates imperialistic ideologies. Said contends that Western cultural productions have historically been intertwined with the imperialist enterprise, often reinforcing colonialist perspectives.

Said's autobiography, *Out of Place* (1999), offers a personal reflection on his experiences of displacement and identity. In it, he discusses the complexities of growing up in multiple cultures and

the sense of being perpetually "out of place." This memoir provides insight into the personal foundations of his scholarly work and political activism. Throughout his career, Edward Said challenged prevailing narratives and encouraged a critical examination of cultural assumptions. His interdisciplinary scholarship and commitment to social justice have left an enduring legacy, influencing a wide range of academic fields and political discourses. Said's work continues to inspire scholars and activists to question dominant paradigms and to seek a more nuanced understanding of global cultures and histories.

Stop to Consider:

- Beyond his academic contributions, Said was an active political figure, particularly concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He was a member of the Palestinian National Council from 1977 to 1991 and was a vocal advocate for Palestinian self-determination. His political writings, including *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994), articulate the Palestinian experience and critique Western media representations of the Middle East.
- As mentioned above, Said was an accomplished musician. In collaboration with Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim, Said co-founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in 1999. This initiative brought together young musicians from Israel, Palestine, and other Middle Eastern countries, fostering dialogue and understanding through music. The orchestra stands as a testament to Said's belief in the power of culture to bridge divides and promote peace.

12.3 MAJOR WORKS

Edward Said's extensive body of work encompasses a range of critical analyses that have significantly influenced literary and cultural studies. Below is a chronological list of his major publications, each accompanied by a detailed summary:

1. *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966)

In his inaugural book, Said examines the works of Joseph Conrad, focusing on the intricate relationship between narrative and autobiography. He delves into how Conrad's personal experiences, particularly his voyages and cultural displacements, inform his fiction. Said argues that Conrad's narratives blur the lines between fiction and autobiography, creating a complex interplay that challenges traditional literary classifications. This work not only offers a profound analysis of Conrad's oeuvre but also sets the stage for Said's later explorations into the intersections of personal history and literary creation.

In his pioneering 1966 work *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, Edward W. Said delves into the intricate relationship between Joseph Conrad's personal experiences and his literary creations. Said posits that Conrad's pervasive sense of personal disintegration compelled him to continually reconstruct his past through both his correspondence and fiction. By meticulously analyzing Conrad's extensive letters, Said uncovers a profound connection between the author's self-perception and the narrative structures of his stories. This introspection, Said suggests, manifests in Conrad's fiction as a reflection of his internal struggles with identity and coherence.

Said further contends that Conrad's choice of exotic settings—such as East Asia and Africa—for his narratives is not merely a backdrop but a deliberate projection of the political dimensions of colonialism. These locales serve as canvases upon which Conrad explores the complexities and moral ambiguities of imperialistic endeavours. Said argues that Conrad's portrayal of these regions mirrors a colonialist preoccupation with “civilizing” native populations, thereby critiquing the very foundations of imperialist ideology. This seminal study not only offers a nuanced understanding of Conrad's literary techniques but also lays the groundwork for Said's later, more renowned critiques of Western representations of the East. By highlighting the interplay between an author's personal history and their creative output, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* challenges readers to reconsider the boundaries between life and art, as well as the ethical responsibilities of storytelling in a postcolonial context.

2. **Beginnings: Intention and Method** (1975)

This seminal work explores the concept of “beginnings” in literature and humanistic studies. Said differentiates between “origin,” which he associates with divine or mythical inception, and “beginning,” rooted in human initiative and secularism. He posits that understanding how narratives commence provides insight into the author's intent and the methodological approaches employed. Drawing from a diverse array of theorists, including Vico, Valéry, and Foucault, Said presents a comprehensive analysis of how beginnings influence the trajectory and interpretation of texts.

In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward W. Said embarks on a profound exploration of how “beginnings” function within literature and humanistic studies. He distinguishes between “origin” — which

he associates with divine or mythical inception — and “beginning,” characterized as a secular, human endeavour. This distinction allows Said to delve into the intentional act of creating meaning, where a beginning serves as the inaugural step in producing significance and differentiating from existing traditions. By authorizing subsequent texts, a beginning not only enables new narratives but also delineates the boundaries of what is considered acceptable within a cultural or literary context.

Drawing upon the insights of intellectuals such as Giambattista Vico, Paul Valéry, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Edmund Husserl, and Michel Foucault, Said examines the multifaceted understandings of beginnings throughout history. He posits that the novel, as a literary form, epitomizes the endeavour in Western culture to imbue beginnings with an authoritative role in experience, art, and knowledge. This perspective underscores the novel's capacity to reflect human initiative and the secular production of meaning, setting it apart from narratives rooted in divine or mythical origins. Said advocates for a form of scholarship that perceives itself as a beginning—a fusion of theory and practice. He emphasizes the necessity for criticism to be both humane and socially responsible, suggesting that the act of beginning is intrinsically tied to the critic's role in society. This approach calls for an active engagement with texts and contexts, where the critic's intentionality and methodological choices contribute to the ongoing discourse within the humanities.

Through this work, Said challenges readers to reconsider the processes by which meaning is constructed and the methods employed in literary and cultural criticism. His analysis offers a nuanced understanding of how beginnings function as both an enabling force and a limiting framework, shaping the trajectory of intellectual and artistic endeavors.

3. **Orientalism** (1978)

Perhaps Said's most influential work, *Orientalism* critiques Western representations of the Eastern world. He argues that Western scholarship has historically portrayed Eastern societies as static, exotic, and undeveloped, constructing an image of the "Orient" that serves to justify colonial and imperial ambitions. This discourse, termed "Orientalism," reflects and perpetuates a power dynamic where the West dominates the East. Said's analysis challenges scholars to reconsider their perspectives on non-Western societies and has laid the foundation for the field of postcolonial studies.

Said posits that Orientalism is not merely an academic pursuit but a constructed discourse that serves to define the Orient as fundamentally distinct and inferior to the Occident, thereby justifying colonial and imperial ambitions. He identifies three interrelated meanings of Orientalism:

- **Academic Discipline**: Historically, Orientalism refers to the scholarly study of Eastern cultures, languages, and histories. Said critiques this field for often perpetuating stereotypes and serving Western hegemonic interests.
- **Epistemological Distinction**: Orientalism embodies a style of thought that creates an ontological and epistemological division between the Orient and the Occident, portraying the former as exotic, backward, and uncivilized.
- **Institutional Power**: This discourse has been instrumentalized by Western institutions to dominate, restructure, and exert authority over Eastern societies.

Central to Said's argument is the notion that knowledge about the Orient is inextricably linked to power. By constructing the Orient as the "Other," Western discourse has facilitated a relationship of

dominance and control. This constructed imagery often depicts Eastern societies as static and unchanging, in contrast to a dynamic and progressive West. Such representations have been utilized to rationalize colonial enterprises and interventions. Said's analysis extends to literature, art, and media, illustrating how cultural productions have reinforced Orientalist stereotypes. He examines works by authors like Gustave Flaubert and travellers who portrayed the East through a lens of exoticism and eroticism, contributing to a distorted and monolithic image of Eastern societies.

Orientalism challenges readers to recognize and question the deep-seated biases embedded within Western representations of the East. Said advocates for a more nuanced and self-reflective approach that acknowledges the diversity and complexity of Eastern cultures, moving beyond reductive and prejudiced portrayals. He deconstructs the power dynamics inherent in the portrayal of the Orient, urging a critical reassessment of how knowledge and representation are intertwined with imperialistic agendas.

4. *The Question of Palestine* (1979)

In this poignant work, Said addresses the historical and political dimensions of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. He provides a detailed account of Palestinian history, emphasizing the narratives often marginalized in Western discourse. Said critiques both Western media representations and political policies that have contributed to the Palestinian plight. By presenting a comprehensive analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he advocates for a more nuanced and equitable understanding of the issues at hand.

In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said offers a profound examination of the Palestinian plight, articulating their narrative

within the broader context of colonialism and imperialism. This seminal work challenges prevailing Western perceptions and advocates for a nuanced understanding of the Palestinian experience. Said begins by deconstructing the historical underpinnings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He critiques the Zionist movement's portrayal of Palestine as “a land without a people for a people without a land,” highlighting how this narrative effectively erased the existence of the indigenous Arab population. This ideological framework, he argues, facilitated the establishment of Israel while marginalizing Palestinian claims to their homeland.

Central to Said's analysis is the impact of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, wherein Britain expressed support for a Jewish national home in Palestine. Said contends that this declaration exemplified colonial disregard for the native Palestinian populace, as it was a promise made by a European power concerning a non-European territory, neglecting the rights and aspirations of the existing inhabitants. Said also addresses the role of Western media and intellectual discourse in shaping public opinion about Palestine. He critiques the pervasive biases that depict Palestinians predominantly through the lens of terrorism, thereby dehumanizing their struggle for self-determination. This misrepresentation, he asserts, serves to justify ongoing occupation and suppress legitimate resistance.

In exploring potential solutions, Said advocates for a binational state where Jews and Palestinians coexist with equal rights. He emphasizes that genuine peace can only emerge from mutual recognition and the dismantling of structures that perpetuate inequality. This vision challenges both the exclusivist tendencies of Zionism and the fragmented approaches within Palestinian leadership. Throughout the book, Said intertwines historical analysis with personal reflection, drawing from his own experiences as a Palestinian in exile. His eloquent prose and rigorous scholarship

provide a compelling narrative that not only recounts the Palestinian story but also calls for a reevaluation of the ethical and political frameworks that have long governed Western engagement with the Middle East.

Decades after its publication, *The Question of Palestine* remains a cornerstone text for those seeking to understand the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Said's incisive critique continues to inspire discussions on justice, representation, and the possibilities for a peaceful coexistence in the region.

5. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981)

This work examines the portrayal of Islam and the Middle East in Western media. Said argues that media representations are often biased, perpetuating stereotypes that depict Islamic societies as monolithic and inherently antagonistic to the West. He critiques the role of so-called experts whose analyses often lack depth and perpetuate misconceptions. Said calls for a more informed and nuanced approach to understanding Islamic cultures, urging media and scholars to move beyond reductive portrayals.

In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Said offers a critical examination of Western media's portrayal of Islam, particularly in the United States. The work serves as the final installment in a trilogy that includes *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine*. Said contends that Western media and academic institutions often present a monolithic and distorted image of Islam, influenced by political and economic interests rather than objective analysis. He argues that the Western depiction of Islam is frequently shaped by historical biases and a

legacy of Orientalism, leading to stereotypes of Muslims as irrational, violent, and hostile toward the West. This portrayal, he suggests, is not a reflection of Islam's diverse realities but a construct serving specific geopolitical agendas. The media's focus on sensational events, such as the Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis, reinforces these negative stereotypes, overshadowing the multifaceted nature of Islamic societies.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to analyzing media coverage of the Iranian Revolution. Said critiques the superficial and often misleading narratives presented by Western journalists, who lacked a deep understanding of Iran's historical and cultural context. This deficiency, he posits, resulted in coverage that emphasized conflict and extremism, neglecting the revolution's underlying causes and the perspectives of those involved.

Said also explores the symbiotic relationship between media outlets, academic experts, and governmental agencies. He asserts that this triad collaborates, consciously or unconsciously, to perpetuate a homogenized and adversarial image of Islam. Experts often rely on outdated or biased frameworks, while media organizations prioritize narratives that align with Western political interests. This collaboration, according to Said, leads to a cycle of misinformation that shapes public perception and policy decisions.

In the concluding sections, Said calls for a more informed approach to understanding Islam. He emphasizes the importance of engaging with Islamic cultures on their own terms, recognizing their diversity, and challenging the reductionist narratives prevalent in Western discourse. By advocating for what he terms “antithetical knowledge,” Said encourages scholars, journalists, and the public to question dominant paradigms and seek a more empathetic and accurate representation of the Islamic world.

Covering Islam remains a seminal work, prompting critical reflection on how media representations influence cross-cultural understanding and international relations.

6. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983)

In this collection of essays, Said delves into the role of the critic in society. He emphasizes that texts are not isolated artifacts but are embedded within the world, influenced by and influencing social, political, and cultural contexts. Said advocates for a “worldly” criticism that acknowledges the interconnectedness of literature and society. He challenges critics to engage with texts in a manner that reflects their broader implications and real-world applications. Said embarks on a profound exploration of the intricate relationships among literature, criticism, and society. This collection of essays challenges the prevailing insularity of literary criticism, advocating for a more engaged and worldly approach.

Central to Said's argument is the concept of “worldliness,” which posits that texts are inextricably linked to the socio-political and historical contexts from which they emerge. He critiques the tendency of contemporary criticism to detach texts from their real-world circumstances, leading to an abstract and often apolitical analysis. By emphasizing the “affiliations” between literature and the world, Said calls for critics to acknowledge and interrogate the power structures and cultural dynamics that shape both the creation and interpretation of texts.

Said also addresses the role of the critic, urging a move away from rigid theoretical frameworks that impose limiting structures on literary works. He contends that such “affiliative” criticism often forces literature to conform to predetermined systems, thereby

neglecting the complex and dynamic interactions between the text and its worldly influences. Instead, he advocates for a form of criticism that is both self-aware and oppositional, one that resists dominant cultural narratives and remains responsive to the diverse experiences encapsulated within literature.

Throughout the essays, Said engages with a range of authors and theorists, including Jonathan Swift, Joseph Conrad, and Michel Foucault. His analysis of Swift, for instance, challenges conventional readings by situating Swift's satirical works within the political and social upheavals of his time, thereby revealing the activist dimensions of his writing. Similarly, in his examination of Conrad, Said explores how narrative techniques reflect the author's own experiences of displacement and colonialism, underscoring the profound impact of personal and historical contexts on literary production. In critiquing contemporary theoretical approaches, Said particularly scrutinizes the works of Derrida and Foucault. While acknowledging their contributions, he cautions against the potential for such theories to become insular and detached from the material realities they seek to analyze. Said emphasizes the necessity for criticism to remain grounded in the tangible world, engaging directly with the political and social issues that influence both literature and its critique.

Ultimately, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* serves as a compelling call for a more holistic and engaged form of literary criticism. Said's essays encourage critics to transcend theoretical confines, to consider the broader contexts of literary works, and to recognize their own roles within the cultural and political landscapes they inhabit. By doing so, criticism can become a dynamic force that not only interprets the world but also actively participates in its transformation.

7. **After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives** (1986)

Collaborating with photographer Jean Mohr, Said presents a poignant portrayal of Palestinian life. Through a combination of essays and photographs, the book captures the daily experiences, struggles, and resilience of Palestinians. Said's narrative provides a personal and introspective look into the Palestinian identity, moving beyond political rhetoric to highlight individual stories and collective memories. This work humanizes the Palestinian experience, offering readers an intimate glimpse into their world; it intertwines evocative prose with compelling imagery, offering a nuanced exploration of identity, displacement, and resilience. Said's narrative delves into the fragmented reality of Palestinians, both within their homeland and in the diaspora, reflecting on themes of exile and the quest for belonging. Mohr's photographs complement this narrative, capturing intimate moments that reveal the humanity and perseverance of individuals amidst adversity. Together, they challenge monolithic perceptions, presenting a mosaic of experiences that underscore the complexity of Palestinian life. This collaboration stands as a testament to the power of interdisciplinary storytelling in illuminating the multifaceted nature of cultural and political identities.

8. **Musical Elaborations** (1991)

Edward W. Said delves into the intricate relationship between music's intimate essence and its societal roles. Originating from his 1989 Wellek Library Lectures, this work traverses the boundaries between personal musical experiences and their broader cultural implications. Said examines the paradox of music as both a deeply private art form and a public spectacle, exploring how performances by artists like Glenn Gould and conductors such as Arturo Toscanini

navigate this duality. He also reflects on the transformative power of music, considering its capacity to transcend social confines and foster new cultural connections. By intertwining theoretical insights with personal reflections, Said offers a nuanced perspective on music's role in shaping and reflecting human experience.

9. **Culture and Imperialism** (1993)

Building upon the ideas presented in *Orientalism*, this collection of essays examines how literature has been complicit in imperial endeavors. Said analyzes works by authors such as Jane Austen and Joseph Conrad, revealing how narratives have reinforced imperialist ideologies. He posits that culture and imperialism are intertwined, with literature often serving as a tool for imperial expansion. Said's analysis encourages readers to reconsider canonical texts, understanding them within the context of colonial histories and power dynamics. Said delves into the intricate relationship between culture and the imperialist endeavors of Western powers, particularly during the 18th through the 20th centuries. Building upon his earlier critique in *Orientalism*, Said argues that cultural artifacts—especially literature—have been instrumental in both reflecting and perpetuating the ideologies underpinning imperialism.

Said posits that Western narratives often constructed a dichotomy between the “civilized” West and the “uncivilized” non-West, thereby justifying colonial domination. He introduces the concept of “contrapuntal reading,” urging readers to consider perspectives of both the colonizer and the colonized to fully grasp the cultural implications of imperialism. Central to his analysis is the novel, a literary form that gained prominence alongside European colonial expansion. Said examines works by authors such as Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, and Rudyard Kipling, revealing how their narratives often subtly endorse imperialist agendas. For instance, in Austen's

Mansfield Park, the prosperity of English estates is linked to colonial enterprises, highlighting the often-overlooked economic foundations of domestic tranquility.

Beyond literature, Said explores other cultural expressions, including opera and media, demonstrating how they have reinforced imperialist perspectives. He emphasizes that imperialism is not merely a political or economic endeavor but a cultural project that shapes and is shaped by the arts and humanities. Said also addresses the voices of resistance that emerge from colonized societies. He highlights how indigenous narratives and cultural productions challenge and subvert imperialist discourses, offering alternative viewpoints that enrich our understanding of global history. Therefore, Said invites readers to critically engage with cultural texts, recognizing the pervasive influence of imperialism in shaping cultural narratives and urging a more nuanced appreciation of the interconnectedness between culture and power dynamics.

10. **Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures**
(1994)

In this series of lectures, Said discusses the role of the intellectual in contemporary society. He argues that intellectuals have a responsibility to speak truth to power, to challenge prevailing narratives, and to represent the marginalized. Said emphasizes the importance of maintaining a critical distance from institutions and power structures to preserve intellectual integrity. He advocates for a form of intellectual engagement that is both politically active and morally grounded.

Said posits that true intellectuals transcend mere professionalism, embodying a spirit of exile and marginality that enables them to

question prevailing norms and “speak truth to power.” Drawing on thinkers like Antonio Gramsci and Julien Benda, Said contrasts the “organic” intellectual, who emerges from and serves a specific class, with the detached critic upholding universal principles. He emphasizes that intellectuals must resist co-optation by institutions, maintaining independence to challenge orthodoxy and advocate for the marginalized. Said also highlights the tension between national loyalty and universal ethics, urging intellectuals to adopt a cosmopolitan perspective that transcends parochial affiliations. By embracing amateurism driven by passion rather than narrow specialization, intellectuals can offer holistic critiques of societal issues. Ultimately, Said calls for a mode of intellectual engagement that is both politically active and morally grounded, serving as a conscience for society and a catalyst for change.

11. **Out of Place: A Memoir** (1999)

In this introspective memoir, Said reflects on his upbringing and the sense of displacement he experienced throughout his life. Born in Jerusalem and raised in Cairo, he navigated multiple identities and cultures, often feeling “out of place.” The memoir delves into his personal history, exploring themes of exile, identity, and the formative experiences that shaped his intellectual journey. Said's narrative offers a deeply personal perspective, shedding light on the intersections between his life and his scholarly work. Said offers a profound exploration of his early years, capturing the essence of displacement and identity formation. Born in Jerusalem in 1935, Said's upbringing traversed the culturally rich landscapes of Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon. This memoir delves into the intricate dynamics of his family life, marked by a stern, authoritative father and a nurturing yet complex mother. Their contrasting influences profoundly shaped his sense of self and belonging.

Said's educational journey was characterized by attendance at elite institutions, including Cairo's Victoria College, where he grappled with the rigidities of colonial education systems. These experiences intensified his feelings of being perpetually alienated as he navigated the intersections of his Arab heritage, Christian faith, and American citizenship. The memoir vividly portrays the challenges of reconciling these multifaceted identities within environments that often imposed conflicting expectations.

A significant portion of the narrative is dedicated to Said's internal struggles with identity and exile. He reflects on the profound impact of political upheavals, such as the establishment of Israel and the resulting Palestinian displacement, events that indelibly marked his personal and communal history. Through eloquent prose, Said articulates the emotional and psychological toll of living between worlds, offering readers an intimate glimpse into the complexities of diasporic existence.

Out of Place is not merely a recounting of past events but a poignant meditation on the themes of memory, loss, and the enduring quest for self-understanding. Said's narrative resonates with universal experiences of dislocation and the search for identity, making it a compelling read for those interested in the human dimensions of cultural and political conflicts.

12. **Reflections on Exile and Other Essays** (2000)

This expansive collection brings together numerous essays that span Said's career, covering a wide range of topics from literature and music to politics and culture; it encapsulates over three decades of his incisive literary and cultural criticism. This collection traverses a multitude of subjects, reflecting Said's profound engagement with

themes of identity, displacement, and the intricate dynamics between culture and imperialism.

Central to the anthology is the titular essay, "Reflections on Exile," where Said delves into the profound dislocation and melancholy inherent in the exile experience. He contrasts the romanticized literary portrayal of exile with its harsh realities, emphasizing the unbridgeable chasm it creates between individuals and their native lands. Said articulates how exile fosters a unique consciousness, often leading to a heightened sense of nationalism or a reconstituted identity among displaced groups such as Palestinians, Jews, and Armenians. This essay not only offers a personal introspection but also a universal commentary on the human condition of estrangement.

Beyond this, the collection showcases Said's versatility, featuring essays that critique Western depictions of the East, analyze the works of literary figures like Joseph Conrad and George Orwell, and explore the interplay between politics and literature. His essay on V.S. Naipaul, for instance, critically examines Naipaul's perspectives on post-colonial societies, highlighting the complexities and contradictions inherent in his narratives. Another notable piece reflects on the role of intellectuals in society, urging them to transcend parochial boundaries and engage with global issues.

Said's erudition is evident throughout the anthology, as he seamlessly weaves personal narrative with scholarly analysis. His reflections are imbued with a sense of urgency and commitment, challenging readers to reconsider preconceived notions about culture, identity, and power dynamics. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* stands as a testament to Said's enduring legacy as a

thinker who persistently interrogated the intersections of politics, literature, and society.

13. **On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain** (2006):

Edward Said delves into the creative complexities that often characterize the final works of artists. Challenging the conventional notion that late-stage artistry embodies serenity and resolution, Said posits that many artists, confronting their mortality, produce works marked by intransigence, unresolved tensions, and a deliberate departure from established norms.

Central to Said's exploration is Ludwig van Beethoven's late compositions. Said, drawing upon Theodor Adorno's analyses, observes that Beethoven's final pieces, such as the late string quartets, eschew harmonious synthesis in favour of fragmentation and discontinuity. This "late style" reflects a conscious estrangement from societal conventions, presenting art that is introspective and resistant to facile interpretation. Said extends this examination to literary figures like Jean Genet and Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. In Genet's later works, there is a palpable tension between commitment and betrayal, mirroring his complex relationship with political causes and personal identity. Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, written towards the end of his life, encapsulates themes of decay and the inexorable passage of time, portraying a society on the cusp of transformation yet steeped in nostalgia. Said also explores Richard Strauss's final operas, which, rather than conforming to contemporary trends, revisit and reinterpret earlier musical forms, embodying a defiant resistance to the passage of time.

The concept of "lateness" in art, as articulated by Said, encompasses more than the temporal proximity to an artist's death. It signifies a deliberate stylistic evolution where creators, fully aware of their

impending mortality, engage in a profound dialogue with their own oeuvre and the cultural milieu. This late style often manifests as a defiance of traditional forms, embracing complexity and ambiguity over closure and clarity.

Said's own confrontation with terminal illness during the composition of *On Late Style* imbues the work with a poignant immediacy. His reflections are not merely academic but resonate with personal insight into the existential realities that inform late artistic expression. Through this lens, Said offers a nuanced perspective on how the awareness of life's finitude can catalyze a distinctive and transformative creative impulse.

SAQ:

1. What are the primary criticisms of Said's *Orientalism*, and how have they influenced subsequent scholarship? (100 words)
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2. What implications does Said's work have for the role of the intellectual in society? (60 words)
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3. How does Said's critique of "cultural imperialism" relate to contemporary global media practices? (60 words)
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12.4 KEY CONCEPTS

Said introduced several critical concepts that have profoundly influenced literary and cultural theory. Among his most impactful ideas are “Orientalism,” “Imaginative Geography,” and “Worldliness of Texts.”

- **“Orientalism”:** In *Orientalism* (1978), Said examines how Western scholarship has historically portrayed Eastern societies through a lens he terms “Orientalism.” This framework, he argues, constructs the “Orient” as exotic, backward, and fundamentally different from the “Occident,” thereby justifying colonial and imperial ambitions. Said posits that this discourse is not merely an innocent academic pursuit but a powerful tool that shapes perceptions and reinforces Western dominance over Eastern cultures. By highlighting the pervasive stereotypes and generalizations embedded in Western literature, art, and media, Said challenges readers to recognize and question the deep-seated biases that continue to influence contemporary understandings of the East.
- **“Imaginative Geography”:** Building upon the concept of “Orientalism,” Said introduces “Imaginative Geography,” which explores how spatial distinctions are culturally constructed rather than naturally inherent. He suggests that the demarcation between “us” and “them,” or “here” and “there,” is a product of imagination, often serving political and ideological purposes. This constructed geography fosters a sense of otherness, positioning non-Western societies as distant and different, thereby facilitating their domination and control. Said’s analysis reveals how these imagined divisions are perpetuated through literature, art, and media,

influencing geopolitical strategies and cultural interactions. By deconstructing these artificial boundaries, he encourages a more nuanced and interconnected understanding of global cultures.

- **“Worldliness of Texts”:** In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said introduces the idea of the “Worldliness of Texts,” emphasizing that literary works are not created in isolation but are embedded within social, political, and historical contexts. He argues that texts both influence and are influenced by the world around them, reflecting the power dynamics and cultural narratives of their time. This perspective challenges purely aesthetic or formalist interpretations, advocating instead for a critical approach that considers the interplay between literature and its broader societal milieu. Said's concept urges critics and readers to acknowledge the active role literature plays in shaping and being shaped by real-world events and ideologies, thus bridging the gap between art and life.

12.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION AND LEGACY

Edward Said's critical legacy is mostly based on *Orientalism*. The book has been both highly influential and a focal point of extensive critical debate. While the book is lauded for pioneering postcolonial studies and challenging Western perceptions of the East, it has also faced substantial critique. Critics have questioned Said's methodology, suggesting that his broad generalizations about Western scholarship lack nuance. Historian Bernard Lewis argued that Said created an artificial homogeneity among Orientalists, neglecting the diversity of their perspectives and contributions. Lewis also contended that Said's focus on British and French

scholars overlooked significant German contributions to Oriental studies, thereby presenting an incomplete narrative. It must be noted, however, that Said criticised Lewis as a Zionist apologist, and the two engaged in fierce public debates.

Additionally, scholars like Robert Irwin have challenged the historical accuracy of Said's assertions. Irwin suggested that Said's portrayal of a monolithic Western discourse on the Orient oversimplifies complex scholarly traditions and interactions. He emphasized that many Orientalists were driven by genuine intellectual curiosity rather than imperialist motives. Moreover, some academics have critiqued Said's theoretical foundations. They argue that his reliance on Foucauldian discourse analysis leads to a deterministic view, implying that all Western representations of the East are inherently biased and serve imperialist agendas. This perspective, they suggest, undermines the possibility of objective scholarship and dismisses the potential for cross-cultural understanding.

Despite these critiques, *Orientalism* remains a cornerstone in cultural and literary studies, continually inspiring discussions on the power dynamics inherent in cultural representation and the responsibilities of scholars in portraying other societies.

To conclude, Edward Said's legacy is multifaceted, profoundly influencing literary criticism, postcolonial studies, and political discourse. *Orientalism* not only redefined academic approaches to cultural studies but also laid the foundation for the burgeoning field of postcolonial theory. Beyond academia, Said was a vocal advocate for Palestinian rights, using his platform to highlight the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to champion the cause of self-determination for his people. His collaboration with

Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim led to the creation of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, a symbol of cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Said's interdisciplinary approach seamlessly wove together literature, music, and politics, offering a holistic critique of cultural imperialism and advocating for a more nuanced understanding of global interrelations. His enduring influence continues to inspire scholars, activists, and artists worldwide, fostering critical engagement with issues of representation, identity, and power dynamics.

Check Your Progress:

1. How does Said's concept of "Orientalism" challenge traditional Western representations of Eastern societies? (60 words)
2. In what ways does "imaginative geography" influence cultural perceptions and political policies? (60 words)
3. What role does the "worldliness of texts" play in understanding literature's impact on society? (60 words)

12.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have covered an introduction to Edward Said, his critical work, and his legacy. In the next unit, we will cover Said's "travelling theory," a theory that examines how concepts evolve as they move between cultures and disciplines, often undergoing significant changes in meaning and application.

12.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT- 13

EDWARD SAID: “TRAVELLING THEORY”

Unit Structure:

13.1 Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Origin of “Travelling Theory”

13.4 Definition of “Travelling Theory”

13.5 Case Studies Illustrating “Travelling Theory”

13.6 Evolution of the Theory and Critical Reception

13.7 Contemporary Relevance

13.8 Summing Up

13.9 References and Suggested Reading

13.1 OBJECTIVES

Through this unit, you will be able to read and analyse:

- Said’s concept of “travelling theory”;
- the origin of the concept, and its contemporary relevance;
- the critical reception and the evolution of the concept;
- case studies that illustrate “travelling theory”.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

The realm of intellectual discourse is perpetually animated by the emergence, evolution, and migration of ideas. Theories—structured frameworks devised to explain phenomena—serve as the scaffolding upon which scholarly understanding is built. They

originate from the human endeavour to interpret the world, shaped by specific historical, cultural, and personal contexts. Yet, the journey of a theory seldom concludes at its inception; it traverses time and space, adapting and transforming as it encounters new milieus. This dynamic voyage of ideas underscores the fluidity of knowledge and the interconnectivity of human thought.

Within this landscape of intellectual migration stands Edward W. Said, a towering figure whose contributions have profoundly influenced literary criticism, postcolonial studies, and cultural theory. Born in Jerusalem in 1935 and later a distinguished professor at Columbia University, Said's scholarship consistently interrogated the intersections of culture, politics, and identity. His seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), unveiled the West's patronizing representations of the East, revealing how knowledge production is entangled with power dynamics. Beyond this, Said's extensive oeuvre reflects a deep commitment to understanding how ideas are not static entities but are continually reshaped by the contexts they encounter.

Central to Said's intellectual pursuits is his concept of "travelling theory," introduced in his 1982 essay of the same name. This notion encapsulates the metamorphosis that theories undergo as they move across different temporal and spatial contexts. Said posited that theories are not immutable doctrines; instead, they are dynamic constructs that gain new dimensions of meaning when applied to diverse situations. He observed, "Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another" (Said 226). This perspective invites scholars to consider not only the origins of a theory but also its subsequent adaptations and reinterpretations.

The significance of Said's "travelling theory" lies in its illumination of the fluid nature of intellectual constructs. In an academic environment that often seeks definitive interpretations, acknowledging the transformative journey of theories encourages a more nuanced engagement with knowledge. It prompts scholars to question the universality of theoretical frameworks and to remain vigilant about the contextual factors that influence their application. This approach fosters an awareness that theories, much like the cultures they seek to explain, are subject to change and redefinition.

Moreover, examining how theories adapt and transform when applied to new contexts is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it reveals the inherent flexibility and resilience of intellectual paradigms. A theory that can traverse different contexts and still offer insightful explanations demonstrates its robustness and relevance. Conversely, the challenges a theory faces in new settings can expose its limitations, guiding scholars toward necessary refinements or the development of alternative frameworks.

Secondly, understanding the journey of theories enhances cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue. As ideas migrate across disciplines and cultures, they foster a synthesis of perspectives, enriching the collective intellectual landscape. This cross-pollination can lead to innovative approaches and solutions to complex problems, reflecting the interconnectedness of human knowledge.

Furthermore, scrutinizing the transformation of theories underscores the importance of context in intellectual endeavors. It serves as a reminder that theories are not conceived in vacuums; they are products of specific historical, cultural, and social conditions. As such, their applicability and interpretation are invariably influenced by the contexts in which they are employed. This awareness guards

against the uncritical application of theories, encouraging scholars to adapt frameworks thoughtfully to align with the nuances of new situations.

In essence, Edward Said's concept of "travelling theory" offers a profound lens through which to view the evolution of ideas. It challenges the notion of static knowledge, advocating instead for an appreciation of the dynamic interplay between theories and the contexts they inhabit. By embracing this perspective, scholars can engage more deeply with the transformative power of ideas, fostering a more reflective and adaptable approach to understanding the world.

13.3 ORIGIN OF "TRAVELLING THEORY"

Said's concept of "travelling theory," introduced in his 1982 essay of the same name, reflects his extensive engagement with postcolonial studies and critical theory. Said's scholarly pursuits were deeply influenced by his personal experiences of displacement and identity, themes that permeate his work. His academic journey was marked by a commitment to unraveling the intricate relationships between culture, politics, and imperialism. His seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), critiqued Western representations of the East, arguing that such portrayals were not mere fantasies but served as instruments of colonial domination. This analysis laid the groundwork for postcolonial studies, challenging scholars to reconsider narratives shaped by imperialist agendas.

In the early 1980s, Said's attention turned toward the dynamics of intellectual discourse, particularly how theories evolve as they move across different contexts. This interest culminated in his 1982 essay

“Travelling Theory,” published in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. In this piece, Said examined the journey of ideas, asserting that theories are not static entities but are transformed through their application in new situations. He observed, “Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another” (Said).

Said illustrated this concept by analyzing the trajectory of Georg Lukács’s theory of reification. Originally rooted in the socio-political context of early 20th-century Budapest, Lukács’s ideas were later adapted by thinkers like Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Williams. Said noted that as these theories traveled, they underwent modifications that sometimes diluted their original revolutionary impetus. He remarked, “A theory... moves from one place to another, it is put into new uses, it enters into new configurations, it loses some of its original power” (Sorensen).

This observation led Said to a critical insight: the potency of a theory is intimately tied to its originating context. When transplanted into different environments, theories can be reinterpreted in ways that either invigorate or diminish their foundational intent. This process raises important questions about the adaptability and integrity of intellectual frameworks as they traverse diverse cultural and historical landscapes. Said’s exploration of traveling theory underscores the necessity for scholars to remain vigilant about the contextual underpinnings of the theories they employ. It serves as a reminder that intellectual constructs are not universal absolutes but are shaped by the specificities of time and place. This perspective encourages a more reflexive and critical engagement with theoretical paradigms,

promoting an awareness of how ideas are molded by, and in turn mold, the contexts they inhabit.

Stop to Consider:

Georg Lukács, in the essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” from his seminal 1923 work *History and Class Consciousness*, introduced the concept of “reification” to describe how capitalist societies transform social relationships into objectified entities, making human interactions appear as relations between things. This process extends Karl Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism, wherein the value of human labor is obscured by the market value of commodities.

In capitalist economies, the pervasive commodification leads to the perception that social structures and relations are natural and immutable, rather than human-made and changeable. This fosters a “contemplative stance” among individuals, rendering them passive observers who adapt to societal structures as though they were unalterable natural laws. As Lukács articulates, reification necessitates that society satisfies its needs through commodity exchange, resulting in the fragmentation of human experience and the dominance of rationalized, law-like systems over social life. Moreover, reification leads to the objectification of individuals, treating them as mere components within the economic system. This diminishes personal agency and perpetuates alienation, as people become cogs in the capitalist machine, their labour and existence reduced to quantifiable units. Lukács emphasizes that this phenomenon is not confined to the economic sphere but permeates all aspects of social life, including law, politics, and culture, resulting in a society where human relations are governed by the logic of commodities.

Understanding reification is crucial for recognizing the mechanisms through which capitalism sustains itself and for developing a critical consciousness aimed at transforming these dehumanizing structures.

13.4 DEFINITION OF “TRAVELLING THEORY”

Edward Said’s concept of “travelling theory” illuminates the dynamic journey of ideas as they move across different temporal and spatial contexts, undergoing reinterpretation and transformation. In his seminal essay “Travelling Theory,” Said articulates that theories are not static entities confined to their original contexts; rather, they possess a mobility that allows them to traverse various cultural and historical landscapes. He observes, “Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another” (Said 226). This movement subjects theories to a series of adaptations, reshaping their meanings and applications in response to new environments.

Said’s framework challenges the notion of theories as immutable constructs. He posits that the true vitality of a theory is revealed through its capacity to adapt and resonate within diverse contexts. This adaptability is not merely incidental but is integral to the life of a theory, as it encounters different cultural, political, and historical pressures that necessitate reinterpretation. Said emphasizes the importance of recognizing this fluidity, stating that the movement of ideas is “both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity” (Said 226).

Said delineates a discernible pattern in the migration of theories, identifying four key stages that characterize their journey:

1. **Point of Origin**: This initial stage refers to the specific circumstances and context in which a theory is conceived. It encompasses the intellectual environment, cultural backdrop, and personal influences that contribute to the theory's formation. Understanding this origin is crucial, as it provides insight into the foundational intentions and assumptions embedded within the theory.

2. **Distance Traversed**: As a theory moves beyond its birthplace, it encounters new contexts that exert various pressures and influences. This journey involves a passage through different cultural and historical landscapes, each presenting unique challenges and interpretations. The theory's core concepts may be tested, leading to potential shifts in emphasis or meaning.

3. **Conditions of Acceptance and Resistance**: Upon entering a new environment, a theory faces a spectrum of responses ranging from acceptance to resistance. Factors such as prevailing intellectual trends, ideological compatibilities, and societal values play significant roles in determining how the theory is received. This stage is pivotal, as the interaction between the theory and its new context can lead to modifications aimed at enhancing its relevance and applicability.

4. **Transformation and Incorporation**: In this final stage, the theory undergoes a process of transformation, adapting to its new setting through reinterpretation or integration with existing ideas. This metamorphosis may result in a version of the theory that differs substantially from its original form, reflecting the unique contours of the context it now inhabits.

Said underscores that these stages are not merely sequential steps but represent a complex, ongoing process wherein theories are continually reshaped by their engagements with diverse contexts.

This perspective invites scholars to remain vigilant about the evolving nature of theoretical constructs and to consider the multifaceted influences that inform their development and application.

Check Your Progress:

1. In what ways do the stages of a theory's travel—origin, distance traversed, conditions of acceptance, and transformation—affect its interpretative power in new contexts? (100 words)
2. How does Said's concept of traveling theory challenge the notion of theories as fixed entities? (100 words)

13.5 CASE STUDIES ILLUSTRATING “TRAVELLING THEORY”

Edward Said's concept of “travelling theory” elucidates how intellectual frameworks evolve as they move across different cultural and historical contexts. This dynamic process involves theories being reinterpreted and reshaped, often leading to significant transformations in their application and understanding. To illustrate this phenomenon, we will examine several case studies that demonstrate the practical manifestations of traveling theory.

1. Transformation of Identity in Immigrant Literature

The migration of individuals across cultural boundaries often necessitates a reconfiguration of personal and communal identities. This transformation can be analyzed through the lens of Said's travelling theory, as the concept of identity itself undergoes reinterpretation in new socio-cultural landscapes. In their study,

Saxena and Sharma explore this dynamic by examining literary works that depict the immigrant experience. They argue that “when a theory and an idea moves from one place to another, it is influenced and to some extent transformed by its new uses and its new position in new times and places” (Saxena and Sharma 55). This perspective aligns with Said’s assertion that theories are not static; they adapt and evolve in response to new contexts. By analyzing narratives of immigration, Saxena and Sharma demonstrate how the concept of identity is renegotiated, reflecting the mutable nature of theoretical constructs as they traverse different cultural terrains.

2. Orientalism and Early Modern Travel Writing

Said’s *Orientalism* critiques the Western construction of the “Orient” as an exotic and inferior counterpart to the “Occident.” This framework has been applied to analyze early modern travel writings, revealing how representations of the East were shaped by and, in turn, influenced Western perceptions. Roddan’s study delves into this interplay, noting that “Said’s analysis of the relationship between representational power and colonial authority remains relevant to our understanding of early modern travel texts” (Roddan 169). By applying Said’s insights, Roddan illustrates how the narratives of travellers were not merely descriptive accounts but were imbued with the ideological constructs of their time, thus participating in the broader discourse of Orientalism. This case study exemplifies the traveling of theoretical frameworks, as Said’s

concepts are utilized to reinterpret historical texts, shedding light on the enduring impact of Orientalist thought.

3. Anthropology and Western Academia in *In an Antique Land*

Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* serves as a literary exploration of the intersections between anthropology, history, and personal narrative. The novel challenges traditional Western modes of knowledge production by juxtaposing the author's experiences in contemporary Egypt with historical accounts. This narrative structure reflects the traveling of anthropological theories, as Ghosh navigates between different temporal and cultural contexts. The work raises questions about the definitiveness of academic discourses and the extent to which unique cultural experiences can be generalized. By intertwining personal narrative with scholarly inquiry, Ghosh's work embodies the essence of travelling theory, demonstrating how concepts adapt and gain new dimensions when applied across diverse contexts.

4. Reinterpretation of *Heart of Darkness* Through Postcolonial Critique

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has undergone significant reinterpretation through the application of postcolonial theory, particularly Said's insights on Orientalism. Initially celebrated for its critique of imperialism, the novella has been reevaluated for its portrayal of Africa and its inhabitants. Min's analysis highlights this shift, noting that Conrad "shows much sympathy for Africans' suffering and harsh condemnation of imperialism. However, at the same time he unwittingly assumes sort of Western White's

superiority...” (Min 65). This reassessment exemplifies travelling theory, as the application of new theoretical lenses transforms the understanding of a literary work, revealing underlying biases and contributing to an evolving discourse on colonialism and representation.

5. The Global Coffee Economy and the Rwandan Genocide

The intersection of economic structures and social dynamics can be examined through the travelling of theories related to globalization and conflict. Kamola’s study on the global coffee economy’s role in the Rwandan genocide illustrates how economic theories, when applied to specific contexts, can uncover complex causal relationships. He argues that “structured economic-material relations made the conditions for genocide possible” (Kamola). This application of economic theory to a socio-political event demonstrates how theoretical frameworks can travel across disciplines, adapting to analyze multifaceted phenomena and highlighting the interconnectedness of global systems.

These case studies underscore the practical applications of Edward Said’s concept of travelling theory, illustrating how theories are not static entities but are continually reshaped as they move through different contexts. Whether through the reinterpretation of identity in immigrant literature, the analysis of Orientalist discourse in travel writing, or the application of economic theories to historical events, the adaptability and transformation of theories enrich our understanding of complex issues. By acknowledging and examining this dynamism, scholars can engage more deeply with the evolving nature of knowledge and its multifaceted manifestations across time and space.

13.6 EVOLUTION OF THE THEORY AND CRITICAL RECEPTION

Over a decade later, in 1994, Said revisited and refined “travelling theory” in his essay “Travelling Theory Reconsidered,” offering nuanced insights into the dynamics of theoretical adaptation. In the latter, Said acknowledges the inherent complexities involved when theories move from their original contexts to new environments. He emphasizes that while theories possess the potential to illuminate and inspire across diverse settings, they are also susceptible to dilution or distortion during their journey. Said notes that as theories travel, they may lose their initial insurgent force, becoming domesticated within the receiving culture’s intellectual frameworks. This process can lead to a situation where the theory’s original critical edge is blunted, and its capacity for radical critique diminished.

A significant aspect of Said’s reconsideration is his focus on the agency of the receiving culture in interpreting and reshaping imported theories. He argues that the interaction between the traveling theory and the host environment is not passive; instead, it involves active engagement where the receiving culture’s intellectual traditions, political contexts, and social structures play crucial roles in determining how the theory is assimilated and transformed. This perspective underscores the bidirectional nature of theoretical travel, highlighting that while theories influence new contexts, they are simultaneously reshaped by them.

Said’s concept of travelling theory has elicited diverse responses from scholars across disciplines, reflecting its profound impact on intellectual discourse. Some scholars have embraced the concept as a valuable framework for understanding the fluidity of ideas and the

intercultural dynamics of knowledge production. For instance, Moya Lloyd, in her editorial for *Redescriptions*, reflects on Said's insights, noting that "the circulation of ideas takes different forms, including acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation" (Lloyd 121). This acknowledgment of the multifaceted nature of theoretical travel aligns with Said's emphasis on the active role of receiving cultures in shaping imported theories. Conversely, certain critiques have emerged, questioning the implications of Said's framework. Some argue that the concept may inadvertently suggest a deterministic view of theoretical adaptation, where the integrity of theories is inevitably compromised during their journey. Others contend that Said's model does not sufficiently account for instances where traveling theories retain their original potency or even gain new critical dimensions in different contexts.

Moreover, scholars have explored the applicability of travelling theory within specific disciplines. In the field of international relations, for example, the concept has been utilized to examine how Western-centric theories are received and reinterpreted in non-Western settings. This application underscores the relevance of Said's insights in understanding the global dynamics of knowledge dissemination and the potential for epistemic hegemony.

13.7 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The concept of travelling theory has profound implications for the study of intellectual history and cultural exchange. It highlights the necessity of contextual awareness when engaging with theoretical frameworks, acknowledging that the meaning and efficacy of a theory are contingent upon the specificities of the environment in which it is applied. This understanding fosters a more nuanced and

critical approach to the adoption and adaptation of theories, encouraging scholars to consider the historical and cultural contingencies that shape intellectual discourse.

Moreover, recognizing the transformative journey of theories challenges the notion of intellectual purity or authenticity. It suggests that the evolution of ideas is a natural and enriching process, wherein cross-cultural and cross-temporal interactions contribute to the depth and breadth of theoretical insights. This perspective promotes an appreciation for the diversity of thought and the collaborative nature of intellectual advancement.

SAQ:

1. Can the adaptation of theories in different cultural and temporal settings lead to a loss of their original critical edge, as Said suggests, or might such adaptations enhance their relevance and applicability? (200 words)

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2. To what extent does Said’s traveling theory illuminate the processes by which Western academic concepts are appropriated and reinterpreted in non-Western contexts? (100 words)

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13.8 SUMMING UP

Edward Said’s articulation of travelling theory offers a compelling framework for understanding the dynamic life of ideas. By

delineating the stages through which theories move and transform, Said provides a lens through which scholars can examine the fluid interplay between concepts and contexts. This approach not only enriches our comprehension of theoretical developments but also underscores the importance of adaptability and contextual sensitivity in intellectual pursuits.

13.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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