UNIT-7 : REVIEW WRITING

UNIT STRUCTURE

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7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- familiarise yourself with the concept of review and its importance
- learn how to write reviews of different genres like books, films, music, theatre etc.

7.2 INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A REVIEW?

A review, in general, means a formal assessment or evaluation of something with the intention of instituting change if necessary. It is a critical evaluation of a text, event, object, or phenomenon. Reviews can consider books, articles, entire genres or fields of literature, architecture, art, fashion, restaurants, policies, exhibitions, performances, and many other forms. In the context of media studies, when we talk about reviews, it refers to a critical appraisal of a book, play, film, music album etc. published in a newspaper or magazine.

The basic purpose of a review is to present a brief non-biased analysis of a literature or media product like a book, music album, movie, or live

performances like a play or drama and inform the audience if the book or the film or the play is recommended to be read or watched or not, without giving away the climax. Most readers/listeners/audiences depend solely on popular reviews to decide whether or not to spend their money on the book, song or the film. Reviews are written by experts as well as by common readers or audiences. Usually reviews are written for fresh or newly released content.

7.3 REVIEWING DIFFERENT GENRES

Now that we have understood what a review is, let us explore how different genres of media and literary products are reviewed and what are their basic elements.

Music Review

When we talk about music review, it could refer to live music performances, recorded music as well as reviews of the composition alone of a particular music. Reviews of live music performances tell readers about the performers or group(s) that were involved and the pieces or songs that were performed. Music critics and music writers also review recordings of music, including individual songs or pieces or entire albums.

Music reviews are basically an evaluation of the quality of lyrics, tune and composition. It is helpful if the reviewer is a musician and understands music theory, musical styles, and the type of music to be reviewed. It is essential for the reviewer to be aware of the target audience for which the music review is intended.

For example, here is a music review of Papon's album 'The Story Now' (as published in musicaloud.com)

> ***"Ae Ri Sakhi** sees **Papon** give a contemporary pop-based treatment to **Amir Khusro**'s traditional qawwali, and tops it off with his own soulful rendition of the piece. While the original melody is retained for most part, Papon makes some changes to the second verse. The interludes feature two neat solos – first one has **Rinku Rajput***

*doing a bit of jazz on piano while **Manasqam Mahanta**'s guitar rules the second. The composer's breezy tune works quite well for the journey theme that **Saahil** is based on (**Vaibhav Modi**'s words). While the arrangement is well done in general, the song soars in its elaborate interlude where guitars and horns come together in a carnival-esque gaiety before **Inapakurti D Rao** takes over with a fine sax solo.*

*The reggae-flavoured **Loving a Dream** is the only song that hasn't really worked for me in the relative scheme of things. There are individual elements still worth appreciating though, **Kishore Sodha**'s trumpet coda is a keeper. Papon turns lyricist as well (alongside **Ankur Tewari**) for the album's most beautiful, **Kahin Na Kahin**. There is a sweet melody that the singer delivers like a boss, and backing him in an unplugged setting are two of the sweetest sounding instruments – accordion (**Sameer Chiplunkar**) and mandolin (**Tapas Roy**). Once again the composer makes sure to feature a brilliant instrumental solo from the two musicians, Tapas in particular doing a beautiful job.*

*Papon's **The Story Now** is as winsome as **The Story So Far** which was his debut album way back in 2012 (this statement would incidentally hold true in a literal sense as well). And special kudos to the way the man has highlighted some of the instrumentalists in each of the songs.**"***

Movie/Television/Video Review

Reviews which analyse and evaluate movies, television shows or other video productions, particularly recently released ones are known as movie reviews. Movie or film criticism can be both journalistic as well as academic in nature. Journalistic or popular reviews are opinions or recommendation of the movie or television show in terms of its length, content and focus usually covered by journalists and often by the common public and these

reviews are published in magazines or newspapers.

On the other hand academic film criticism is pursued by scholars informed by film theory who discuss the movie or the video within a historical, social, political, or theoretical context and are published in academic journals. Movie reviews include comments on the movie's story, narration, direction, editing, cinematography, performance and music and other aspects.

Let us take a look at the following review of the 2016 movie Pink (as published in hindustantimes.com)

Pink

Cast: *Taapsee Pannu, Kirti Kulhari, Andrea Tariang, Amitabh Bachchan, Angad Bedi*

Director*: Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury* ***Rating:*** *4/5*

Two cars are moving in two different directions. Each has three passengers - the first one has girls and the second is being driven by boys. Parallel cutting suggests a connection. One of the boys is bleeding and the girls look tense. A dark and sinister night has engulfed the Delhi-NCR region and everyone's waiting for the morning light.

This is your story. Our story.

Meenal Arora (Taapsee Pannu), Falak Ali (Kirti Kulhari) and Andrea Tariang (Andrea Tariang) are working women living in a posh south Delhi locality. Their daily struggle with neighbours' questioning eyes has made them brave and ready for tougher challenges. They meet Raajveer Singh (Angad Bedi) and his friends at a rock concert which ends when Raajveer gets hit by a bottle and starts bleeding.

Raajveer is rich, highly educated and well connected. He decides to seek vengeance on the girls. A war between the genders starts and the police, society, parents, judiciary and everyone else become a party.

After delivering acclaimed Bengali dramas like Anuranan, Antahin and Aparajita Tumi, Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury forays into Hindi with Pink, and what a debut it is. There aren't any of the usual jazzy

Bollywood criminals here yet you feel terrified. No dramatic sounds to enhance the mood, still you want to hear it. No dim lights, but you want to look away.

The reason is simple: You know this world and its inhabitants.

If Kanu Behl's Titli brought out the harsh truths of east Delhi's lower middle class vicinity, Pink sketches a similar picture of a tony south Delhi. Unfortunately, the attitude of people inhabiting these districts is common across the country and could even be universal.

Pretension, ego, sense of male superiority and skewed ideas of perfect womanhood make it complicated, intriguing, disgusting and disturbing. But, we have seen this happening around us in real life. So, it doesn't come as a surprise when the police arrest Meenal under Section 307 IPC, attempt to murder. Who cares if she did it in self-defence! Nobody knows what happened that fateful night. Everyone's assuming. Because the girls went with the boys and they ate and drank together, moral yardsticks have to be set. A woman investigative officer doesn't help either. After all, she too is a part of this society.

But, a well-intentioned man is yet to enter the game and could change it for the girls. Once a successful lawyer, Deepak Sehgal (Amitabh Bachchan) had to hang his boots because of a deteriorating mental condition. Sehgal returns to the courtroom for one last time. This can be surprising for people who want a woman to fight on behalf of others, but then is there really a match for that devastating baritone and intimidating eyes? Bachchan gives it all and drives his points home with such force that you fall in love with him all over again. The master's complete dominance silences the courtroom and the audience. Don't be amazed if you start feeling uncomfortable and break into tears and claps.

Every single actor has upped the ante in this 136-minute riveting drama. If Taapsee excels in initial courtroom scenes, Kirti takes it to a whole new level in the finale. The girls have shown a tremendous

range and Pink belongs to them. Nobody has overshadowed them, not even Bachchan or a shrewd lawyer Prashant, played by a super intense Piyush Mishra.

Attention to detail is visible in the screenplay. Scenes keep changing at a rapid pace without being preachy. Also, it's a case which is very ordinary in nature. Hundreds of such cases are filed every day. What's the big deal about this one?

Well, that's exactly the big deal. It can be your story. It's about every woman living in this egoistically twisted man's world. It's about parents, brothers and husbands worried about their loved ones' safety.

Pink keeps us gripped from all sides even as a strictly entertainment package. The intricacies of the case unfold like a thriller. You won't miss the usual Bollywood courtroom theatrics either. Still you will get to know a thing or two about the contemporary feminist debates.

Book Review

Book reviews are opinionated articles in which books are analyzed based on content, style, and merit. Nature of book reviews may vary from genre to genre. While reviewing a book of poetry or fiction or any work of which the literary merits are an important element, the reviewer usually focuses on writing the review from the perspective of their personal taste. Some book reviews on the other hand simply summarises the plot of the book highlighting the central points, while refraining from giving away the climax. The key elements of a book review are comments on its content, narrative style, language, usefulness, and reader-friendliness.

To help you understand better, here is a review of the book 'The Dance of the Sea' as published in the website indianbookreviews.com.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once remarked, "A smooth sea never made a skillful sailor." This quote fits rather perfectly in Soosaiya Anthreas's fine novel, The Dance of the Sea. Set in a coastal slum village of Kanyakumari, his book paints an intriguing picture of the difficult challenges life puts forth. The Dance of the Sea traces with

remarkable subjectivity, the unfortunate lives of the fisherfolk situated in the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent. It speaks about how ambition and poverty strives together in the rural lives of Indian fishermen.

The protagonist, Sebastian, struggles to escape his squalid town of slum dwellers and later on emerges as a successful engineer. Sebastian's success makes him less self-effacing as he goes on to desert his lover, Gloria, who lives an independent and more successful life, with regards to money and fame. He also leaves his poverty-stricken sister to herself, not bothering to lend her a helping hand in deadly crisis. But the problems develop into a more serious one as the 2004 Tsunami strikes and take the lives of hundreds of fisher folk, and their properties are swallowed by the sea. More troubles follow as the fisher folk divide themselves into two rival factions based on the method of fishing, and the community disintegrates.

Reading this book will be an emotional experience as the common man will get to live the lives of a set of people hitherto hidden to the fast-paced urbanised population of the world. The unthinkable lives of the characters, ravaged by pain have been addressed directly and in a poignant manner. It shows the research that the author has done over the years. There is anger, humour and grief. Somehow, I felt that Sebastian's longing to escape his hometown was his own way of seeking salvation. Sebastian wanted to disappear and his search for respite from the brutality of the world is rather breathtaking.

The author hasn't hesitated to expose the vulnerability of his characters and this makes the book all the more dramatic. The tenacity of the characters especially that of Gloria is admirable. The deadening weight of the circumstances draws a thoughtful picture, nevertheless. A picture of how people find themselves in each other and how strokes of empathy lessens the naive narcissism of the better off and how there is a light of hope however faint,

shining through the wreckage.

The writing style is fine except in some places it lags and tends to get jerky. The author has used rich language to depict the lives of the poor fisher folk. In spite of the challenges and traumas, there exists a kind of harmonic suppleness. The novel is extremely atmospheric and very emotionally involving. There also prevails the inevitable melancholy the story brings with it. The Dance of the Sea is a very interesting novel. It is the kind of book that you might want to read in sessions, to take time and read it in your own pace. The book doesn't fail to communicate effectively with the reader and even when the book has ended, the sea looms over your imagination distinguishing itself as an entity.

Soosaiya Anthreas was born in the year 1959 in Azhikkal, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu to fisher folk parents. He graduated in Engineering from CIT, and is interested in Philosophy, Literature and Spirituality.

Theatre Review

One can also write reviews of staged plays or dramas, analysing the performance of the actors and evaluating other elements such as the script, direction and storyline. Reviewing live theatre performances can be tricky, as the reviewer cannot go back to a particular scene or a particular page to refer, like one can in the case of reviewing books or movies. Such reviews basically cover the details of the play like the location, name of the director, producer and the actors, scriptwriters, etc. and comments on the storyline and performances.

Given below is a review of a play 'Chakravyuh' that was staged in Mumbai (as published in timesofindia.indiatimes.com).

Play: Chakravyuh

Director: Atul Satya Koushik

Duration: 100 minutes

Cast: Nitish Bharadwaj, Lalit Bhardwaj, Rahul Bhuchar and others

Language: Hindustani

A philosophical play based on mythological characters can tend to be preachy and predictable. But what if you add an element of thrill to the narrative? Director and writer of 'Chakravyuh', Atul Satya Koushik does just that. To start off, as the name suggests, this play tells the story of the thirteenth day of the great battle of Mahabharata. While it explores Arjun's son, Abhimanyu's killing, it also discusses some of the most important philosophical questions of life. Because it is mostly written in poetic verses, and addresses existential questions of our being, it appeals to mature audiences.

But what makes the play different from other mythological adaptations is that between long verses, it brings in elements of action that give the viewers a break from an otherwise heavy discourse. Surprisingly, the highlights are the fight scenes between Abhimanyu and his enemies — the Kauravas. Once he enters the chakravyuh (a defence formation), in an absolutely adrenaline-rushing sequence, you see the young warrior battling it out with the enemy army, using bamboo sticks for swords and other ancient war weapons. Throughout the deadly war-scene, the moves appear real and your heart goes out to the 16-year-old Abhimanyu. You hold your breath, praying he doesn't get struck. On Mumbai's stages, rarely have we seen anything so exhilarating as these battle sequences.

One of the other major draws of course is Krishna's character, which has been fittingly essayed by Nitish Bharadwaj. Decades ago, the actor played Krishna in the hugely popular TV adaptation of Mahabharata, and seeing him in the same avatar, after all these years, brings an element of nostalgia. The opening scene is set on a dark stage, with a chariot on which Bharadwaj is standing and his back faces the audience. A golden light illuminates his frame, and as he talks in his powerful voice, it creates a mesmerising stage moment.

This well-written play, like any other philosophical piece does have a takeaway — we are all Abhimanyus, fighting in our own

chakravyuhs. Whether it's our professional or personal lives, we're constantly trying to survive. Life is tough and no one has ever been able it get out of it alive!



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What is a review?

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Q. 2. What is the basic purpose of writing a review?

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Q. 3. What are the different types of media review writing? Describe each briefly.

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7.4 BASIC STEPS TO FOLLOW WHILE WRITING A REVIEW

In the previous section, we discussed about the different types of review writing. Now, you must understand that the style of reviewing different media products will be different. It will also differ from genre to genre. In this section however we will learn a few basic steps to follow while writing any kind of media review.

Let us broadly divide the steps into two parts:

1. Analysing the source
2. Composing the review

For part 1, here are the following things to keep in mind:

- **Study your source thoroughly**: Whatever it is that you are about to review, whether it is a book, or a movie or a live performance, it is important to read/watch/listen to it carefully and thoroughly so that you do not miss out any important points.
- **Take notes**: While you are watching the movie or reading the book, take detailed notes of how you felt about a certain scene or a certain chapter, or other important observations, as you are watching it.
- **Noting basic details**: Make a list of the basic details of the source and ensure that it is correct. For example, in case of a book review, the list will include the title of the book, the name of the author, genre of the book, name of the publisher, year of publication etc. Similarly, in case of a movie, the list will include the title of the movie, name of the director, name of the producer or production house, genre of the movie, names of the lead actors, name of the music director and choreographers, date/year of release etc. In case of a stage play, you must list down the title of the play, the names of the director, lead actors, scriptwriters etc., genre of the play, the venue where it was staged etc.
- **Analyse**: Have a clear opinion of whether you liked the movie/book/play or not; whether it was great, bad or mediocre. List out the positive as well as the negative points against the different parameters.
- **Necessary background research**: You can also do some additional research on the past works of the author/director or the actors, or read up their earlier interviews in which they might have revealed important facts about the movie or the book. This could give you added information as well as a new perspective when you sit down to compose your review.

  Now that you have all the ideas that you need, we come to part 2, that is, composing your review. Here are the steps that you must follow:
- **Catch the attention of the reader**: Open with an introduction paragraph that catches the attention of the reader as well as identifies the book/movie/play/music album that you are reviewing. It is also a good idea to provide a list of the basic details such as the name of the movie/book/play/music album, name of the author/director, names of the lead actors, name of the publishing/production house and the genre

at the very beginning. It is also important to let your readers know from the introductory paragraph itself whether you have liked the book/movie/ play/music album or not.

For example-
Title of the Book*- The White Tiger*
Author*- Aravind Adiga*
Publisher*- Harper Collins*
Genre*- Picaresque novel*
Aravind Adiga won the Booker Prize in 2008 for writing the book 'The White Tiger'. I was always curious to know what was in it, and how this first-time fiction won the prestigious award. Once I started reading the book, I discovered it was un-putdownable! Written in an angry rustic tone with a lot of dark humour and satire, the author convincingly tells the tale of 'The White Tiger', an entrepreneur in the IT hub of Bangalore in a most unimaginably creative manner.

Let us look at another example:
Title of the Movie- *Sachin: A Billion Dreams*
Cast- *Sachin Tendulkar, Arjun Tendulkar, Virendra Sehwag*
Director- *James Erskine*
A cinematic tribute to the face of Indian cricket is a challenging feat. While this docudrama singles out the Little Master from a billion in revisiting his professional peaks, flashes of his personal life render him like one among the billion. The film establishes Sachin Tendulkar not just as a right-handed batsman but someone who re-instilled faith in Indian cricket to a point that when his outside edges were caught behind — a billion heads would drop as the conclusion of the match was inevitable.

- **Briefly summarise**: Once you have drawn the attention of your reader and established your overall opinion of your review source, briefly summarise the contents without giving away the climax or anything

that would spoil the suspense for the readers. You can give an overview of the plot or storyline, introduce the characters and describe the basic premise of the narrative.

- **Put your analysis into words:** Now it's time to properly write down the points you had noted down for your analysis and evaluation. Organise your comments based on the different parameters you had evaluated the media source. For example, in case of a music album review, describe what you think about the lyrics, composition, tune of the songs, the singer's performance etc. Similarly in case of a movie, go on to address the lead actors' performances, direction, editing, story line, narration, cinematography etc. In case of a stage play, apart from discussing about the acting and direction, you can also write about other design elements of the production, such as the lighting, sound, costumes, make up, and set and props. You can also point out what you felt was missing and what could have been the possible scope of the work. Try to be as unbiased in your opinion as possible.

- **Conclude:** In the concluding paragraph, summarise your thoughts to reflect your overall opinion about the media source you are reviewing and express your verdict about whether or not the reader should go ahead and watch the movie/play or read the book or listen to the music album.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 4. List the steps to be carried out when analysing a movie?

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Q. 5. How should the introductory paragraph of a review be written?

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Q. 6. What are the different types of media review writing? Describe each briefly.

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7.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD REVIEW

Now that you have learnt the different types of review and how to write reviews of different genres of media, let us now take a look at a few points that can be described as the characteristics of a good, balanced media review.

- The write up must be short, crisp and to the point.
- The language must be simple and lucid.
- The review must be non-biased and balanced.
- Vague and ambiguous comments must be avoided.
- It is best to avoid using terms such as: “you” “your” and “I” in the review. It is assumed that whatever is written is the expressed opinion of the reviewer and if not, than that statement should be quotations.
- It is also helpful if the reviewer avoids the use of clichés, and generic, non-specific terms such as “interesting,” and accumulates a list of colourful adjectives that can be used to describe the music. The words “appealing” “fascinating” and “exciting” are more suitable that is the word, “interesting.”
- The information provided must be correct. It is important to double check the facts that one has included in the review.
- The review must be written in a way that it gives a gist of the reviewed source and enables the reader to decide whether or not to invest his/ her money in it, but it must not kill the suspense or reveal integral details.



ACTIVITY

What was the last movie that you watched? What was the last book you read? By following the steps as explained in the previous sections write reviews of the same.



7.6 LET US SUM UP

Let us sum up our unit on review writing with the following points:

- A review, in general, means a formal assessment or evaluation of something with the intention of instituting change if necessary. In the context of media studies, when we talk about reviews, it refers to a critical appraisal of a book, play, film, music album etc. published in a newspaper or magazine.
- The basic purpose of a review is to present a brief non-biased analysis of a literature or media product like a book, music album, movie, or live performances like a play or drama and inform the audience if the book or the film or the play is recommended to be read or watched or not, without giving away the climax.
- Music review could refer to live music performances, recorded music as well as reviews of the composition alone of a particular music. Music reviews are basically an evaluation of the quality of lyrics, tune and composition.
- Reviews which analyse and evaluate movies, television shows or other video productions, particularly recently released ones are known as movie reviews. Movie reviews include comments on the movie's story, narration, direction, editing, cinematography, performance and music and other aspects.
- Book reviews are opinionated articles in which books are analyzed based on content, style, and merit. The key elements of a book review are comments on its content, narrative style, language, usefulness, and reader-friendliness.

- Theatre review refers to reviews of staged plays or dramas, analysing the performance of the actors and evaluating other elements such as the script, direction and storyline. Such reviews basically cover the details of the play like the location, name of the director, producer and the actors, scriptwriters, etc. and comments on the storyline and performances.
- While you are watching the movie or reading the book, take detailed notes of how you felt about a certain scene or a certain chapter, or other important observations, as you are watching it.
- Open with an introduction paragraph that catches the attention of the reader as well as identifies the book/movie/play/music album that you are reviewing.
- Briefly summarise the contents without giving away the climax or anything that would spoil the suspense for the readers. You can give an overview of the plot or storyline, introduce the characters and describe the basic premise of the narrative.
- Organise your comments based on the different parameters you had evaluated the media source.
- In the concluding paragraph, summarise your thoughts to reflect your overall opinion about the media source you are reviewing.



7.7 FURTHER READING

Kessler, Lauren Belmont (1989), *Mastering the Message: Media Writing with Substance and Style* CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co.



7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No 1 : A review, in general, means a formal assessment or evaluation of something with the intention of instituting change if necessary. It is a critical evaluation of a text, event, object, or phenomenon. Reviews can consider books, articles, entire genres or fields of literature, architecture, art, fashion, restaurants, policies, exhibitions, performances, and many other forms. In the context of media studies, when we talk about reviews, it refers to a critical appraisal of a book, play, film, music album etc. published in a newspaper or magazine.

Ans to Q. No 1 : The basic purpose of a review is to present a brief non-biased analysis of a literature or media product like a book, music album, movie, or live performances like a play or drama and inform the audience if the book or the film or the play is recommended to be read or watched or not, without giving away the climax. Most readers/listeners/audiences depend solely on popular reviews to decide whether or not to spend their money on the book, song or the movie.

Ans to Q. No 1 : Different types of media review includes book review, movie review, music review and theatre review.

Ans to Q. No 4 : Here are the following steps to follow before starting to write a review.

- Study your source thoroughly
- Take notes
- Noting basic details
- Analyse
- Necessary background research

Ans to Q. No 5 : One must open with an introduction paragraph that catches the attention of the reader as well as identifies the book/movie/play/ music album that we are reviewing. It is also a good idea to provide a

list of the basic details such as the name of the movie/book/play/music album, name of the author/director, names of the lead actors, name of the publishing/production house and the genre at the very beginning.



7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q.1 : What is the basic purface of a review?

Q.2 : What is the importance of a movie review?

B. Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words):

Q. 1: Explain how to write a book review.

Q. 2: What are the characteristics of a good review?

C. Long questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words):

Q. 1: What are the key elements of a book review?

Q. 2: What are the steps to be followed while writing a review?