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Literary and Critical Theory I

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 3

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SEMESTER 4

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 1: LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY I

BLOCK 3: THEORITICAL APPROACHES III

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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BLOCK 3: INTRODUCTION

This Block contains a total of five units, the details of which are as the following:

Unit 11: In this unit, we shall discuss Postcolonialism and try to grasp the difficult ideas often discussed under Postcolonialism. Whereas it tacitly assumed common ground between the cultural products of the former colonies and the culture of the metropolis, postcolonial theory and criticism emphasises the tension between the metropolis and the former colonies. At the heart of Postcolonial studies, there is also a critique of Eurocentrism and a strong focus on those who have become the victims of Eurocentric thought, attitudes, politics and exploitation.

Unit 12: In this unit, we shall deal with Feminism that came into vogue in English usage around 1890s with women's conscious struggle to resist patriarchy and to disturb the established patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in the transformation of society.

Unit 13: In this unit, we shall get to read on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory. The knowledge systems, over the years, have inscribed or promoted an ideology where man is considered to be the superior gender in comparison to woman. These knowledge systems, relying on its sources, have a significant role in maintaining the hegemonic gender discourse. we shall learn that the most common characteristic of the feminist, as well as queer theorists, are questioning the origins of patriarchy, starting with the definition of the commonly used terms, 'gender' and 'sexuality'.

Unit 14: In this unit, we shall be able to see how ecocriticism has been seen as the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

Unit 15: In this unit, we shall try to discuss Marxist criticism in which *social class* and *class relations* function as central instruments of analysis. Marxist criticism and theory as an intellectual perspective provides a wholesome counterbalance to our propensity to see ourselves and the writers that we read as completely divorced from the socio-economic circumstances.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately

after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 11: POST COLONIALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Introducing Postcolonialism

11.4 Major Thinkers/Theorists of Postcolonialism

- 11.4.1 Edward Said (1935 - 2004)
- 11.4.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942 -)
- 11.4.3 Franz Fanon (1925 - 1961)
- 11.4.4 Homi Bhabha (1949 -)

11.5 Important Concepts of Postcolonialism

- 11.5.1 Orientalism
- 11.5.2 The Idea of the "Subaltern"
- 11.5.3 Hybridity

11.6 Reception of Postcolonialism

11.7 Let us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.10 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss Postcolonialism as an important trend of Literary and Critical Theory
- trace the history of Postcolonial criticism and assess its significance
- make a list of the major critics of Postcolonialism and understand their contributions
- explain the concepts popularised by the postcolonial theorist and critics
- assess the significance of Postcolonialism in the subsequent critical/theoretical development in the humanities.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3 of the course on Literary and Critical Theory I. In this unit, we shall discuss Postcolonialism and try to grasp the difficult ideas often discussed under Postcolonialism. We shall note that in around 1980s, Commonwealth literary studies and colonial discourse analysis became part of the then emergent field of literary, cultural, anthropological, political, economic, and historical enquiry. This emerging field is called Postcolonial studies. Whereas it tacitly assumed common ground between the cultural products of the former colonies and the culture of the metropolis, postcolonial theory and criticism emphasises the tension between the metropolis and the former colonies. At the heart of Postcolonial studies, there is a critique of Eurocentrism and a strong focus on those who in one way or another have become the victims of Eurocentric thought, attitudes, politics, exploitation, and other unwarranted intrusions. We shall learn from the unit that Postcolonial theory and criticism radically questions the expansionist premises of Imperialism of the colonisingpowers and, in particular, the system of values that supported Imperialism. Postcolonial theorists find the ambivalences and hybrid cultural forms the vantage points that allow them to expose the internal doubts and resistance that the West has so far suppressed.

11.3 INTRODUCING POSTCOLONIALISM

Postcolonial literature as well as criticism arose following the struggles of many nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, which now are referred to as the “tricontinent” rather than the “third world”, for independence from colonial rule. According to Robert Young, Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonised peoples and the colonisingpowers; to analyse the process of decolonisation; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities.

Colonial/colonialism denotes the manner in which one culture appropriates the land, people and resources of another to further its imperialist ends. Edward Said defines Colonialism as the necessary consequence of imperialist practices and attitudes, thereby suggesting a causal relation- ship. As a consequence of colonial occupation and the discourses and practices generated and maintained by colonisers, the idea of Colonialism may also be said to designate the attributes of the specific political and epistemological discourses by which the colonising power defines those who are subjected to its rule. Postcolonialism in literary studies refers to literary texts produced in countries and cultures that were under the control of European powers at some point in their history.

Peter Barry provides a list of what Postcolonial critics usually do. They are as the following:

1. They reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seek to show its limitations of outlook, especially its general inability to empathise across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference.
2. They examine the representation of other cultures in literature as a way of achieving this end.
3. They show how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with Colonisation and Imperialism.
4. They foreground questions of cultural difference and diversity and examine their treatment in relevant literary works.
5. They celebrate hybridity that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the coloniser, through a colonial school system, and that of the colonised, through local and oral traditions).
6. They develop a perspective, not just applicable to Postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'Otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential change.

The year 1950 saw the publication of some seminal texts of Postcolonialism: Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialism* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*,

George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and so on. According to Robert Young, the "founding moment" of Postcolonial theory was the journal called *Tricontinental*, launched by the Havan Tricontinental of 1966, which "initiated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism". Edward Said's landmark work *Orientalism* appeared in 1978. More recent works of Postcolonialism include *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin and *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990) by Gayatri Spivak as well as important works by Homi Bhabha, Benita Parry, and Kwame Anthony Appiah and so on. All these have shaped what we today call Postcolonial Studies.

Although Said, Bhabha, and Spivak still remain the most prominent influences, Postcolonial Studies, in recent years, can be said to have moved away considerably from its Poststructuralist inspiration. The broadly historical-materialist (Marxist) perspective that we find in a number of recent Postcolonial studies has also left its mark on Postcolonial literary studies. Especially Benita Parry and Robert Young (Young in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) have worked to direct attention to a politics grounded in the material, social, and existential conditions of the colonised people, Young's revisionist attitude towards religion, nationalism, pan-Africanism has substantially broadened our view and understanding of colonial and postcolonial resistance.

Interestingly, in postcolonial fiction we find a similar move away from some of the central concerns of postcolonial literary theory. Cultural self-definition and political self-determination are two sides of the same coin. The desire for cultural self-determination, or cultural independence, is one of the moving forces behind the literatures that sprang up in the former colonies in the 1960s and 1970s. Wilson Harris (Guyana), Yambo Ouologuem (Mali), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Wole Soyinka, the winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for literature (also from Nigeria), Derek Alcott, the 1992 Nobel laureate (from Santa Lucia), and a whole range of other writers wrote novels and poems that respond to, and reflect their immediate cultural environment. In their response to specific cultural contexts, these texts signal the emergence of new national literatures. The desire to draw directly on

one's own culture is defended vigorously in an essay called "Colonialist Criticism" (1974) by Chinua Achebe. Arguing that the 'universal' qualities that Western criticism is'universal', he attacks the idea that literary art should transcend its time and place. Paradoxically, his own magnum opus *Things Fall Apart* (1958), describes the effects of colonialism on an Igbo community in moving detail, and is liked by audiences all over the world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What does the term Postcolonialism signify?

Q 2: What do postcolonial critics usually do?

11.4 MAJOR THINKERS/THEORISTS OF POSTCOLONIALISM

The following are some of the important theorists whose works established Post colonialism as an important critical and theoretical phase in recent times. However, the entries are too short. We shall do well to read about them in detail in the books from Further Reading.

11.4.1 Edward Said (1935–2004)

Known as a literary and cultural theorist, Edward Said was born in Jerusalem, Palestine. He received his BA from Princeton in 1960, and his PhD from Harvard in 1964. From 1963 until his death, he was Parr Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He was also visiting professor at prestigious universities like Harvard, Stanford, Johns Hopkins, and Yale. Said's thinking has embraced three broad imperatives:

Firstly, to articulate the cultural position and task of the intellectual and literary critic. Said's formulations in this area, influenced by Foucault, provided a crucial impetus to the so-called New Historicism in the 1980s which was in part a reaction against the tendencies of Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction either to isolate literature from its various contexts or to reduce those contexts to an indiscriminate "textuality."

Secondly, Said's concern has been to examine the historical production and motivations of Western discourses about the Orient in general, and about Islam in particular.

Thirdly, he makes an attempt to bring to light and clarify the Palestinian struggle to regain a homeland. Some regarded him as a model of the politically engaged scholar while others viewed his enterprise as incoherent.

Beginnings (1975) is Said's first influential book. Focusing on the question "What is a beginning?" Said, in this book, Said traces the ramifications and diverse understanding of this concept in history. Here he adapted insights from the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1744). Said defines beginning as its own method, as a first step in the intentional production of meaning, and as the production of difference from pre-existing traditions. Said argues that the novel represents the major attempt in Western literary culture to give beginnings an authorisingfunction in experience, art, and knowledge. In postmodernist literature, beginning embodies an effort to achieve knowledge and art through a "violently transgressive" language. In his next book *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said argues that critical theory has retreated into a "labyrinth of textuality" whereby it betrays its "insurrectionary" beginnings in the 1960s.

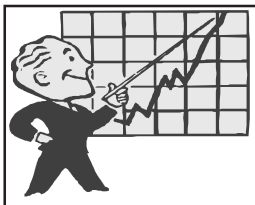
Orientalism (1978) is perhaps Said's one of the most important achievements. Here, Said examines the vast tradition of Western "constructions" of the Orient. This tradition of Orientalism has been a "corporate institution" for coming to terms with the Orient, for authorisingviews about it, and ruling over it. Central to Said's analysis is that the Orient is actually a production of Western discourse, a means of self-definition of Western culture as well as of justifying imperial domination of Oriental peoples. Said concentrates on the modern history of British, French, and American engagement with primarily the Islamic world. Given his crucial treatment of Orientalism as a discourse, his aim is not to show that

this politically motivated edifice of language somehow distorts a "real" Orient, but rather to show that it is indeed a language, with an internal consistency, motivation, and capacity for representation resting on a relationship of power and hegemony over the Orient. Said's subsequent book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is a continuation of the themes raised in *Orientalism* in that it examines the power relations between Occident and Orient hinted at in the earlier work in a more focused manner. Said's uniqueness as a cultural critic lay in the range of his interests, which allowed him to explore the nexus of connections between literature, politics, and religion in a global rather than national or Eurocentric context.



LET US KNOW

The book *Orientalism* is an attempt to display Orientalism as a complex example of the politically and ideologically rooted nature of all discourse, even those forms which have been veiled under the mantle of innocence. Thus, according to Said, "liberal cultural heroes" such as Mill, Arnold, and Carlyle all had views, usually overlooked, on race and imperialism (*Orientalism*, 14). Using a vast range of examples, from Aeschylus' play *The Persians* through Macaulay, Renan, and Marx to Gustave von Grunbaum and the *Cambridge History of Islam*, Said attempts to examine the stereotypes and distortions through which Islam and the East have been consumed. These stereotypes include: Islam as a heretical imitation of Christianity (*Orientalism*, 65–66); the exotic sexuality of the Oriental woman (*Orientalism*, 187); Islam as a uniquely unitary phenomenon and as a culture incapable of innovation (*Orientalism*, 296–298). Also considering America's twentieth-century relations with the Arab world, Said suggests that the electronic postmodern world reinforces dehumanised portrayals of the Arabs, a tendency both aggravated by the Arab–Israeli conflict and intensely felt by Said himself as a Palestinian.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are some of the imperatives of Edward Said?

Q 4: What is the significance of Edward Said's book *Orientalism?*

11.4.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942—)

Gayatri Spivak was Born in Calcutta, and was educated at both Indian and American universities. She was a student of Paul de Man at Cornell University. She is known for her translation of and lengthy preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, her central concern with the structures of colonialism, the postcolonial subject, and the possibility of postcolonial discourse drawn on deconstructive practices, the feminist movement, Marxism, and Freud. In her influential and controversial essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983), later expanded in her book *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), she addresses precisely this issue of whether peoples in subordinate, colonised positions are able to achieve a voice. A "subaltern" refers to an officer in a subordinate position; the term was used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to refer to the working masses that needed to be organised by left-wing intellectuals into a politically self-conscious force. The term as Spivak uses it also insinuates the "Subaltern Studies Group" in India, a radical group that attempted to articulate and give voice to the struggles of the oppressed peasants of the Indian subcontinent.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has drawn our attention to the large majority of the colonised people who had left no mark upon history, simply because they could not, and were not allowed to make themselves heard. Spivak is also supposed to be the first postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda, which includes the complicity of female writers with imperialism. Spivak writes in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"

(1985): "It should not be possible to read 19th century British fiction without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English."

11.4.3 Franz Fanon (1925–1961)

Franz Fanon was a leading third world intellectual whose work helped inspire the struggle against colonialism and influenced the growth of postcolonial culture. Thus, he became one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century with his views on third world struggle against colonial oppression. He is also one of the most powerful voices of revolutionary thought in the 20th century. Born on the French Martinique, Fanon fought against Nazism in France where he subsequently trained as a psychiatrist. His origins and his experience in both Martinique and France exposed him to the issues of racism and colonialism. An important influence on him was his teacher Aimé Césaire, a leader of the so-called **Negritude movement** which called for cultural separation rather than assimilation of the Blacks. Fanon's books included *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), translated as *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), which explored the psychological effects of racism and colonialism. This book includes the important chapter 'The Fact of Blackness," which describes Fanon's growing awareness of racism in France. As stated already this book shows the strong influence of Fanon's psychiatric training, as he concentrates primarily on the impact of racism and colonialism on the psyche of the black. It also engages in a critical dialogue with French Existentialism, particularly that of Jean Paul Sartre, and exhibits the influence of the *negritude* movement which called for a distinctive black cultural identity rather than complete assimilation into French culture in the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1954, while Fanon was working as a psychiatrist in Algeria, the Algerians rebelled against French rule. The violent struggle for

Algerian independence was led by the National Liberation Front. Fanon edited the Front's newspaper and remained involved in the revolution until his death in 1961. Fanon produced a number of writings connected with Algerian and African revolution; his most comprehensive and influential work was *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), translated as *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). This book analysed the conditions and requirements for effective anti-colonial revolution from a Marxist perspective. It also articulated the connections between class and race. Fanon's works have been an inspiration to the black movement in the United States during the 1960. At the same time, he was a key theoretical resource for the generation of intellectuals and writers who struggled to create viable postcolonial cultural identities in Africa and elsewhere. In the last decades of the 20th century, Fanon was joined by scholars, such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, who often drew on Poststructuralist theorists in describing the postcolonial condition.

11.4.4 Homi Bhabha (1949—)

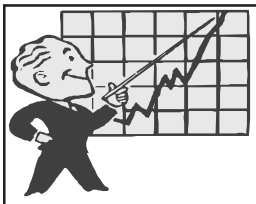
Homi Bhabha extends certain tenets of Poststructuralism into his discussion of colonialism, nationality, and culture. These tenets include a challenging of the notion of fixed identity, the undermining of binary oppositions, and an emphasis on language as underlying our understanding of cultural phenomena. He is one of the most prominent postcolonial theorists, and has stated the following that postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. These theorists formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within modernity. He further opined that the Postcolonial perspective is a substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity–progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the

long past. For Bhabha, the postcolonial perspective has that disruptive potential because the effects of colonialism have in a curious way foreshadowed current poststructuralist views and concerns.

One of the questions that is central to the work of Homi Bhabha is what actually happens in the cultural interaction between coloniser and colonised. In earlier writings on colonialism, such an interaction had often been denied. Aime Cesaire, for instance, claimed in his *Discourse on Colonialism* that between coloniser and colonised there is '[n]o human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonisingman into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production'. Rethinking questions of identity, social agency and national affiliation, Bhabha provides a working theory of cultural hybridity – one that goes far beyond previous attempts by others. In his seminal book *The Location of Culture (1994),* he uses concepts such as mimicry, interstice, hybridity, and liminality to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent. In this book he writes about the way in which colonial subjects are represented as colonial stereotypes.

Bhabha also draws on Frantz Fanon's revolutionary work on colonialism, as well as on the concept of "nation" as defined in Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983). The notion of "hybridity" is central to Bhabha's work in challenging notions of identity, culture, and nation as coherent and unified entities that exhibit a linear historical development. Hybridity expresses a state of "in betweenness," as in a person who stands between two cultures. The West has always been convinced that its presence overseas greatly affected the 'natives', but has never been comfortable with the idea that its sons and daughters might in their turn be affected by the cultures they encountered. It is mostly in literature that we find alternative perspectives. In Joseph Conrad's

Heart of Darkness (1899) the colonial experience has the effect of turning the ivory collector Kurtz into a megolamaniacal barbarian and in E.M. Forster's *Passage to India* (1924) two British women suffer permanently unsettling experiences in India. For Bhabha, who is a major theorist of the subjectivities of coloniser and colonised, their encounter always affects both. Colonialism, with the displacements and terrible uncertainties that it brings, is such a radically unsettling 'affective experience of marginality that the plight of the colonised subject can be seen as prefiguring poststructuralist indeterminacy and fragmentation. However, the colonial experience also affects the coloniser. More specifically, for Bhabha the coloniser cannot escape a complex and paradoxical relationship with the colonised. Drawing on Lacan's views of the way identity gets constructed, Bhabha offers an analysis in which the identity of the coloniser–in Bhabha's work the British coloniser of India – cannot very well be separated from that of the colonised. The coloniser's identity has no 'origin' in himself and is not a fixed entity, but is differential, a product of relations. The 'British' identity of the coloniser as coloniser can only become a 'reality' after the colonial contact which truly confirms it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Discuss briefly Homi Bhabha's contributions to Postcolonial studies?

Q 6: Discuss Bhabha's notion of "hybridity"?

11.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF POSTCOLONIALISM

The following are some of the important concepts of Post Colonialism.

11.5.1 Orientalism

Postcolonial studies perhaps start with the publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978). Drawing on Foucault and,

to a lesser extent, Gramsci, Said's study deeply influenced the agenda of the study of non-Western cultures and their literatures and pushed it in the direction of what we now call Postcolonial theory. The book *Orientalism* is a devastating critique of how through the ages, but particularly in the 19th century Western texts have represented the East, and more specifically the Islamic Middle East during the heyday of imperialist expansion. Using British and French 'scholarly works . . . works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philological studies', Said examines how these texts *construct* the Orient through imaginative representations, through seemingly factual descriptions (in journalistic reports and travel writing), and through claims to knowledge about Oriental history and culture (histories, anthropological writings, academic studies etc.). Together, all these texts constitute a Foucauldian *discourse* that constructs a field of supposed 'knowledge'. Such discourses, although seemingly interested in knowledge, always establish relationships of power and for Said, the West's representations of the East ultimately work within the framework of a conscious and determined effort at subordination.

For Said, the concept of Orientalism has traditionally served 'hegemonic' purposes. According to Antonio Gramsci 'hegemony' which means domination by consent, is the way the ruling class succeeds in oppressing other classes with their apparent approval. In Gramsci's analysis, it does so through culture: the ruling class makes its own values and interests central in what it presents as a common and neutral culture. Orientalism has traditionally served two purposes—one it has legitimised Western imperialism in the eyes of Western governments and their electorates, and second, it has insidiously worked to convince the East that Western culture represented 'universal' civilisation. For Said, Western representations of the Orient, no matter how well intentioned, have always been part of this damaging discourse.

However, many shortcomings, it revolutionised the way Western scholars and critics looked at representations of non-Western subjects and cultures. Said's book drew attention to the way in which the discourse of Orientalism serves to create the West as well as the East. West and East form a binary opposition in which the two poles define each other. The inferiority that Orientalism attributes to the East simultaneously serves to construct the West's superiority. The sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East in fact construct the West as rational, democratic, and progressive. The West always functions as the 'centre' and the East is a marginal 'other' that simply through its existence confirms the West's centrality and superiority.

Thus, the concept of Orientalism offered a challenging theoretical framework and a new perspective on the interpretation of Western writing about the East as well as other non-Western cultures.

11.5.2 The idea of the "Subaltern"

Of all postcolonial theorists, Spivak has most consistently focused on what has come to be called the "subaltern"—literally, the category of those who are lower in position or who are always appropriate to the colonial situation, and are lower in rank. Spivak employs the term to describe the lower layers of colonial and postcolonial society: the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, the day labourers–in short, those groups with the least power of all. Speaking about the female subaltern—a very large and differentiated category among the colonised, she argues that women has traditionally been doubly marginalised. As she states, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."

In her seminal essay **"Can the Subaltern Speak?"**, Spivak, in the wider context of a critique of what she sees as appropriations

of the colonial subject, examines the 19th century controversy between the colonised Indians and their British colonisers over what she calls 'widow-sacrifice'—the burning of widows on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands. Spivak concludes that neither party allowed women – the victims of this practice – to speak. The British texts construct a position for the woman in which she is made to represent Western individualism and, by implication, a superior Western civilisation that emphasises modern freedom, while the Indian ones present her as choosing duty and tradition. Although both parties claim that they have them on their side, the women themselves remain unheard. It is this concern with misrepresentation that had led Spivak to intervene in the project of the so-called Subaltern Studies group, a group of Indian historians trying to write history outside the frameworks of both colonialism and Indian elite politics.

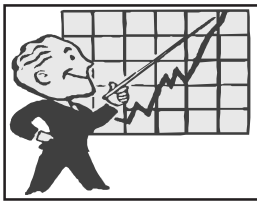


LET US KNOW

"Subaltern" was first deployed as a critical term by the Italian communist thinker Antonio Gramsci. In his use, it refers to the non-elite classes, including the proletariat. In India however, the term "Subaltern" became prominent through its discussion around the late 1970s and early 1980s by a group of Marxist historians who later became known as the "Subaltern Studies Group". These historians adapted Gramscian ideas about hegemony, subordination, and "subalternity" within a discourse designed to contest the dominance of elitist historiographies of colonial India. Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyanendra Pandey, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are some of the most prominent members of the Indian group.

For Spivak, the naive traditional faith in reconstructing history of the Subaltern Studies group – 'real historical experience' as one of them put it – no matter how well intentioned could only lead to

further damage. It is because we must take the 'subaltern' seriously. Spivak combines a Marxist perspective – the emphasis on class as a differentiating factor – with a deconstructionist approach to texts and to identity. In dealing with colonialist texts, she tries to demonstrate how they attain their coherence by setting up false oppositions between a supposed centre and an equally fictive margin and how their language invariably deconstructs the coherence, they try to establish. Given this perspective, Spivak cannot very well escape the conclusion that our identity is without a fixed centre and inherently unstable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What do you mean by the term Subaltern?

11.5.3 Hybridity

The concept of the hybrid made considerable strides into the vocabulary of cultural studies during the 1990s in the context of discussions about globalisation, diaspora cultures and Postcolonialism. Perhaps the most influential of Bhabha's contributions to postcolonial theory is his notion of *hybridity*. While Said's *Orientalism* keeps the spheres of coloniser and colonised rather firmly apart, Bhabha, with his interest in their interaction, sees important movements going both ways. Shifting his focus from 'the noisy command of colonial authority' and 'the silent repression of native traditions' to 'the colonial hybrid', Bhabha argues that the cultural interaction of coloniser and colonised leads to a fusion of cultural forms that from one perspective, and confirms the power of the colonial presence, but that as a form of mimicry simultaneously 'unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power'. Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence. Thus, Bhabha's focus on interaction and his notion of

hybridity have sharpened our awareness of what actually happens (or may happen) under the colonial or postcolonial situation.

11.6 RECEPTION OF POSTCOLONIALISM

Early voices of anti-imperialism stressed the need to develop or return to indigenous literary traditions so as to exercise their cultural heritage of the spectres of imperial domination. Other voices advocated an adaptation of Western ideals toward their own political and cultural ends. The fundamental framework of postcolonial thought has been furnished by the Marxist critique of colonialism and imperialism, which has been adapted to their localised contexts by thinkers from Frantz Fanon to Gayatri Spivak.

The importance of postcolonial criticism within contemporary literary studies is reflected in the number of good introductions that have appeared in the last ten years. Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (2nd edn 2005) provides a very readable historical overview of literary writing from both the colonial and the postcolonial period that in one way or another is concerned with imperialism. Other useful guides include Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English, East and West* (2000), Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (2003), Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), S. Patke Rajeev, *Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2006), and Richard J. Lane, *The Postcolonial Novel* (2006).

Under the influence of important theorists such as Bhabha, the postcolonial often was 'associated', in Elleke Boehmer's terms, 'with metropolitan, diasporic, migrant and minority spaces for which the nation as a horizon of expectation had retreated'. However, the most recent generation of postcolonial writers has moved beyond such a privileging of hybridity. They 'work', to quote Boehmer again, 'to build local "structures of feeling" positioned at several removes from the dominant North, drawn from their life worlds', to the point that contemporary African novelists 'turn increasingly towards local audiences and narrative traditions, and away from the implied European reader'. In what seems a post postcolonial development, Europe no longer dominates the cultural horizon. However, this is not the complete story of contemporary literatures in English.

The effects of globalisation, hybridisation, and nationalism always attract the scholars of postcolonial studies. Most recent postcolonial literary criticism focuses specifically on literatures produced by subjects in the context of colonial domination, most notably in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. The concerns of postcolonial literary studies overlap with those of race and ethnicity studies, a broad field that examines a wide array of topics.



11.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, I am sure, we have gained some ideas regarding Postcolonial studies, which critically analyses the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, from the earliest days of colonial exploration. Drawing on Foucault's notion of 'discourses', on Gramsci's 'hegemony', on Derrida's Deconstruction, and on Marxism, it focuses on the role of texts, literary and otherwise, in the colonial enterprise. It examines how these texts construct the coloniser's superiority and the colonised's inferiority, and in so doing have legitimated colonisation. You have learnt that Postcolonial Studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines the global impact of European colonialism, from its beginnings in the 15th century up to the present. Broadly speaking, it aims to describe the mechanisms of colonial power, to recover excluded or marginalised "subaltern" voices, and to theorise the complexities of colonial and postcolonial identity, national belonging, and globalisation. Following the groundbreaking Edward Said's *Orientalism,* Postcolonial critics have examined the ways in which Western representations of third world countries serve the political interests of their makers. Postcolonial critics problematise any kind of objective perception, pointing out the unbalanced power relations that typically shape the production of knowledge. In this unit, you have read about the major exponents of Postcolonial studies who include important names like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. We have in this unit also learnt about important concepts like Orientalism, Hybridity, Subaltern and so on.



11.8 FURTHER READING

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11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Postcolonialism refers to literary practices in the countries and cultures that were under the control of European powers at some point in their history… …Postcolonialism re-examines the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised… …determines the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonised peoples and the colonising powers… …analyses the process of decolonisation… …participates in the goals of political liberation.

Ans to Q 2: They reject claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature… …examine the representation of other cultures in literature… …expose how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with Colonisation and Imperialism… …foreground questions of cultural difference… …celebrate hybridity… …conditions of marginality, plurality and 'Otherness' are seen as productive sources for potential change.

Ans to Q 3: To articulate the cultural position and task of the intellectual and literary critic…. … to examine the historical production and motivations of Western discourses about the Orient in general, and about Islam in particular…. …to bring to light and clarify the Palestinian struggle to regain a homeland.

Ans to Q 4: In the book *Orientalism,* Said examines the vast tradition of Western "constructions" of the Orient… …he opined that Orientalism helped to come in terms with the Orient, for authorising views about it, and ruling over it… …central to Said's analysis is that the Orient is actually a production of Western discourse.

Ans to Q 5: One of the questions that is central to the work of Homi Bhabha is what actually happens in the cultural interaction between coloniser and colonised…. …rethinking questions of identity, social agency and

national affiliation, Bhabha provides a working theory of cultural hybridity… ... in his seminal book *The Location of Culture (1994),* he writes about the way in which colonial subjects are represented as colonial stereotypes.

Ans to Q 6: The notion of "hybridity" is central to Bhabha's work… … "hybridity" expresses a state of "in betweenness," as in a person who stands between two cultures… …he viewed that the encounter between coloniser and colonised always affects both.

Ans to Q 7: The subaltern literally refers the lower in position or who are always appropriate to the colonial situation, and are lower in rank… …Gayatri Spivak employs the term to describe the lower layers of colonial and postcolonial society: the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, the day labourers… …in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak examines the 19th century controversy between the colonised Indians and their British colonisers.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What does a Postcolonial critic usually do? Discuss with reference to some of the renowned critics of Postcolonialism.

Q 2: How do the Postcolonial critics view the processes of 'representation' under colonialism? Elaborate.

Q 3: Do you think that Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity best serves as an answer to the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised? Discuss.

Q 4: In what ways, do you think, Edward Said's book *Orientalism* inaugurated what we call Postcolonial studies?

Q 5: Discuss the contribution of Gayatri Spivak to Postcolonial Studies with reference to the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak"?

Q 6: What, according to you, is the significance of Franz Fanon's contributions to Postcolonial discussions of the plight of the Black people?

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UNIT 12: FEMINISMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Introducing Feminism

12.4 Different Phases of Feminism

- 12.4.1 First Wave Feminism
- 12.4.2 Second Wave Feminism
- 12.4.3 Third Wave Feminism

12.5 Other Trends of Feminism

- 12.5.1 Socialist/Marxist Feminism
- 12.5.2 French Feminism

12.6 Reception of Feminism

12.7 Let us Sum up

12.8 Further Reading

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.10 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss Feminism as an important trend in Literary Theory
- trace the history of Feminism in terms of its various phases
- make a list of the major critics associated with the feminist movement and understand their contributions
- explain the concepts popularised by the feminist thinkers and critics
- assess the significance of Feminism in the subsequent critical/ theoretical development in the humanities.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

Feminism came into vogue in English usage around 1890s, with women's conscious struggle to resist patriarchy and to disturb the

established patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in the transformation of society. In recent times, Feminist Criticism, in all its many and various manifestations, has also attempted to free itself from naturalised patriarchal notions of the literary and the literary-critical. In this respect, you may argue that Feminism and feminist criticism may better be termed a *cultural politics* than a 'theory' or 'theories'. It is because, feminist criticism is part of the broader political movement that seeks to rectify all sorts of discrimination and inequalities based on gender. Thus, it is pertinent to state that there is not one but many feminisms. In their literary criticism, many feminist critics, however, have attempted to expose the masculinist stereotypes in male-centric literature. Instead, they have turned to study female creativity, genres, styles, themes, careers, and literary traditions and to discover and evaluate lost and neglected literary works by women. Besides, some feminists, like the French counterparts, often seek develop feminist theoretical concepts and methods. By the time we finish reading this unit, besides being introduced to the various feminist critics, we shall also be able to discuss how Feminist theory and criticism have brought revolutionary change into literary and cultural studies by critiquing sexist representations and values, by stressing the importance of gender and sexuality, and by proposing institutional and social reforms.

12.3 INTRODUCING FEMINISM

Feminism takes into considerations the different campaigns, activities, and texts concerned with challenging and transforming the ways women are treated and represented in society. It is in fact a political movement and discourse that encompass a diverse range of perspectives, theories, and methods. Besides analysing patriarchal set up, Feminist theory seeks to propose new ways of 'reading' women to bring about social change. Such a drive undercuts feminist activities ranging from public campaigns for political rights for women, to the search for a new writing that may be termed 'feminine'. For the convenience of discussion, the history of Western feminism can be divided into three movements or "waves". The **"First**

Wave" dates from the end of the 18th century through the beginning of Suffragette (1918-28) and New Women's movements in Britain and the US. The 1960s, on the other hand, signalled the beginnings of the **"Second Wave"** with collective campaign by women on a broad range of issues like sexual health and contraception, domestic abuse, and gender discrimination in the workplace and so on. However, feminist theory in later periods, which may be roughly called the **"Third Wave"** is marked by the emergence of three different models: **Liberal Feminism**, which focuses on achieving full equality and opportunities within existing social structures; **Radical Feminism**, which is revolutionary rather than reformative in its conviction that creating alternative, woman centered institutions and realities will bring about social change; and **Socialist Feminism**, which sees "femaleness" and "femininity" as socially and historically contingent, and is concerned with the economic and cultural contexts of women's oppression.

It is important for you to discuss the history of Western feminism. You should note that Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is often regarded as a beginning of modern feminism in Britain. Here, Wollstonecraft called for reform against the social, political, and economic marginalisation of women at a time when the question of the "rights of man" was being debated in France and the US. She argued that that the existing social structures constructed female inequality as "natural" and that women do not choose to behave as they do, but are instead 'enslaved' by a society that forces them to behave in certain "sentimental" ways. She even identified gallantry and sensibility as major social fabrications which had been developed (by men) to encourage women's subordination. The overarching problem, she argued, was women's lack of access to education, which held them in a "state of perpetual childhood". The book *The Vindication* became an immediate international success and was quickly translated into other languages and published. Following Wollstonecraft's articulation of 'femininity' as a condition resembling slavery, encouraged American women involve themselves in antislavery campaigns and turn their attention to female suffrage.

LET US KNOW



Women writers and women readers always had to work 'against the grain'. For instance, Aristotle declared that 'the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities', and St Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is an 'imperfect man'. When John Donne wrote 'Air and Angels' he alluded to (but did not refute) Aquinas's theory that form is masculine and matter feminine: the superior, godlike, male intellect impresses its form upon the malleable, inert, female matter. Thus, you will be surprised to how, throughout the history of Western culture, women have been viewed as inferior to men. Feminism seeks to counter such a treatment of women.

In Britain, in the second half of the 19th century, debates about women's lack of access to education expanded into a wider questioning of women's political inequality. Gradually, the terms "feminism" and "feminist" entered public usage by the 1890s. The British philosophers and political theorists John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor developed aspects of Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist thought, campaigning for women' suffrage and equal access to education. Mill, in his famous *The Subjection of Women* (1869) argued that all women were repressed citizens. Although *The subjection* is recognised as a progressive feminist text in its call for gender equality, Mill's stance has been criticised for its refusal to question women's position in the domestic sphere. The latter part of the 19th century, following the activities of National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), and Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the British suffrage movement represented a demand for equality, grounded in political and legislative reform.

The passing of the 1928 Representation of the People Act marked the culmination of over six decades of political and social agitation, and extended the partial suffrage that women had received ten years previously in 1918. The same period is marked by different sorts of literary experimentation and innovation to address the relation between women

and literature, and gender and language, by noted authors such as Virginia Woolf, Hilda Dolittle, Edith Wharton, Zola Neale Hurston, and Djuna Barnes. The most influential of these was Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). This small book addresses the question of "women and fiction" and the various ways in which this relationship had been imagined. Her underlying and much celebrated assertion is that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction". She argued: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size". She also highlights how woman's exclusion from electoral and civil privilege is not the result of political legislation and economic inequity only, but also of cultural mores. She foregrounded why women need to undertake critical and creative activity alongside political activity. Sketching out a critical language for addressing questions about gender and sexuality, the canon and literary production, and language and subjectivity, *A Room of One's Own* foreshadows many of the debates that characterise the **"Second Wave"** feminism, and remains one of the most influential texts of the 20th century.

Feminist criticism till 1960s formed part of the broader cultural questioning and collective challenges to authority made by civil rights, student, and antiwar movements. Drawing on previous suffragette activities, women once again began to form organised political bodies, including the liberal National Organisation for Women (NOW) in 1966. Rooted in a conviction that sexism (which means women's subordination to men), is one of the main causes of the cause of women's oppression, **radical feminism** stressed women's experiences of subjugation as women. A key aim was to encourage all women to become involved in political activity and to challenge the separation between the personal and the political.

Of pressing concern to many Anglo- American and European theorists from the late 1960s onward were the androcentric scripts of Freudian psychoanalysis and, in particular, a representation of woman as **"lacking a sexual organ".** Constructions of woman as lack or absence are addressed in two seminal texts of **"Second Wave"** feminist criticism, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*

(both published in Britain in 1970). Millett in particular established an influential reading of Freudian 'penis envy' as a misogynist model, which disallowed the little girl any desire of her own other than to become a man. Alternatively, the British psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell presented a feminist revision of Freudian psychoanalysis in her study *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), which argued Freud's theories opened up new ways of thinking about the construction of sexual subjectivity for women. The 1970s saw serious critical attention paid to women's writing and its traditions by Anglo-American academics. The focus on the sexist ideologies underlying the male-authored canon integral to "images of women" criticism was followed by a female centered approach or, in Elaine Showalter's coinage, **"gynocritics,"** that is, an approach that was engaged with "woman as writer – with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women".



LET US KNOW

In the second half of the decade, there appeared three key texts of feminist thinking: Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, *British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Offering revisionist literary histories, these works were concerned with rereading women writers with established literary reputations (such as Jane Austen, the Brontes, Emily Dickinson, and Ann Radcliffe), but also with extending the female canon to recover forgotten or marginalised female writers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Discuss the main concerns of Feminism or feminist criticism.

Q 2: What are the different phases or waves of Feminism?

Q 3: Name some of the important texts that introduced feminist criticism.

12.4 DIFFERENT PHASES/WAVES OF FEMINISM

In the previous section, you have been provided some glimpse of the different 'phases' or 'waves' of Feminism. This section will, however, help you to discuss them in some greater detail.

12.4.1 First Wave Feminism

The activities of the **First Wave** Feminism may be seen mainly through the works of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir (the others being Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Rebecca West, and so on). Virginia Woolf is often considered 'the founding mother of the contemporary debate' as she 'announces' many of the issues later feminist critics were to focus on and who herself becomes the terrain over which some debates have struggled; and Simone de Beauvoir, with whose *The Second Sex* (1949), the **"First Wave"** may be said to end.

Virginia Woolf's (1882-1941) fame rests on her being a very talented woman writer. However, many feminist critics have analysed her novels from different perspectives. It has been unanimously accepted that *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) are her important contributions to Feminist criticism—the first focussing on the history and social context of women's literary production, and the second on the relations between male power and the professions like law, education, medicine, etc. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argued that women's writing should explore female experience and not form a comparative assessment of women's experience in relation to men's. The essay therefore forms an early statement and exploration of the possibility of a distinctive tradition of women's writing.

Woolf's general contribution to feminism, however, is her recognition that gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed. However, feminist criticism, she seemed to have argued, also need to continually examine the problems facing women writers. She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions, and was herself conscious of the restricted education she had received (she was taught no Greek, for example, unlike her brothers). Rejecting a 'feminist' consciousness, and hoping that she might 'escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness' (*A Room of One's Own*), she appropriated the Bloomsbury sexual ethic of **'androgyny'** and tried to achieve a balance between a 'male' self-realisation and 'female' self annihilation.



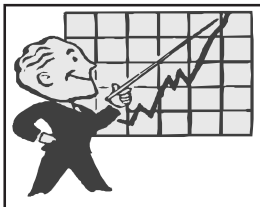
LET US KNOW

Virginia Woolf in her essay "Professions for Women" regards her own career as hindered in two ways. First, she was imprisoned and constrained by the dominant ideologies of womanhood. Second, the taboo about expressing female passion prevented her from 'telling the truth about [her] own experiences as a body'. Her attempts to write about the experiences of women, therefore, were aimed at discovering linguistic ways of describing the confined life of women, and she believed that when women finally achieved social and economic equality with men, there would be nothing to prevent them from freely developing their artistic talents.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) the French feminist, marks the moment when "**First Wave"** feminism begins to slip over into the "**Second Wave"**. Her book *The Second Sex* (1949) established with great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism. She stated that when a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying 'I am a woman': no man would do so. This fact reveals the

basic asymmetry between the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine': man defines the human, not woman, in an imbalance, which goes back to the Old Testament. Being dispersed among men, women do not have no separate history, no natural solidarity; nor have they combined as other oppressed groups have. Woman is riveted into a lop-sided relationship with man: he is the 'One', she the 'Other'. She further argued that Man's dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliance: 'legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth', and, the assumption of woman as 'Other' is further internalised by women themselves.

De Beauvoir's work carefully distinguishes between sex and gender, and sees an interaction between social and natural functions as she states: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman . . . it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature . . . Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*." It is the systems of interpretation in relation to biology, psychology, reproduction, economics, etc. which constitute the (male) presence of that 'someone else'. Making the crucial distinction between 'being female' and being constructed as 'a woman', de Beauvoir can posit the destruction of patriarchy if women will only break out of their objectification.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name some of the important texts that introduced "First Wave" Feminism.

Q 5: In what ways, can Virginia Woof and Simone de Beauvoir be labelled as Feminist critics?

12.4.2 Second Wave Feminism

"Second Wave" feminism and feminist criticism are very much a product of the liberationist movements of the mid-to-late

1960s. Although it continues to share the "**First Wave's"** fight for women's rights in all areas, its focal emphasis shifts to the politics of reproduction, to women's 'experience', to sexual 'difference' and to 'sexuality', as a form of oppression as well as something to celebrate. Five main points are involved in most discussions of sexual difference: biology, experience, discourse, the unconscious, and social and economic conditions. The critics state that the arguments which treat biology as fundamental and which play down socialisation have been used mainly by men to keep women 'in their place'. If a woman's body is her destiny, then all attempts to question 'attributed' sex-roles will be essentialised. On the other hand, some radical feminists celebrate women's biological attributes as sources of superiority rather than inferiority, while others appeal to the special *experience* of woman as the source of positive female values in life and in art. Since only women, the argument goes, have undergone those specifically female life-experiences (ovulation, menstruation, giving birth), only they can speak of a woman's life. They further state that a woman's experience includes a different perceptual and emotional life, because women do not see things in the same ways as men and have different ideas and feelings about what is important or not.

Perhaps the most influential critic of the second wave is the American Feminist critic Elaine Showalter. In her book *A Literature of their Own: British Women novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) she traces the history of women's literature, suggesting that it can be divided into three phases:

Feminine: In the Feminine phase, (1840–1880) women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalised its assumptions about female nature. This phase includes Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot.

Feminist: The Feminist phase (1880–1920) was characterised by women's writing that protested against male standards and values, and advocated women's rights and values,

including a demand for autonomy. This phase includes such radical feminist writers as Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner.

Female: The Female phase (1920—) is one of self-discovery. Showalter says, "women reject both imitation and protest—two forms of dependency—and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" For Showalter, Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson were its most important early 'female' novelists.

Most feminists, however, consider that women have been brainwashed by this type of patriarchal ideology, which produces stereotypes of strong men and feeble women. Certain themes, then, dominate **"Second Wave"** Feminism: the omnipresence of patriarchy; the inadequacy for women of existing political organisation; and the celebration of women's difference as central to the cultural politics of liberation. In addition, these can be found running through many major **"Second Wave"** writings, like Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), which explores the destructive neutralisation of women within patriarchy, through the critical reassessments of socialism and psychoanalysis, to the radical (lesbian) feminism of Kate Millett and Adrienne Rich. In feminist literary theory more particularly, it leads to the emergence of so-called "Anglo-American" criticism, an empirical approach adopted by the **'gynocriticism'** of Elaine Showalter. This type of criticism concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's own culture. Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe literary criticism based in a feminine perspective. Probably the best description Showalter gives of 'gynocritics' is in *Toward a Feminist Poetics*: "In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to

adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture."



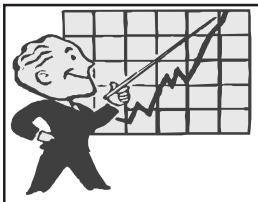
LET US KNOW

Anglo American Feminism is in dispute with the more theoretically driven 'French' feminist criticism, which draws especially on the work of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, and emphasises not the *gender* of the writer ('female') but the 'writing-effect' of the text ('feminine') hence, **Ecriture** feminism. It is worth noting here that this distinction between 'Anglo- American' and 'French' feminist criticisms is a significant faultline in **"Second Wave"** developments, and distinguishes two dominant and influential movements in critical theory since 1960s.

Another influential Feminist from the **"Second Wave"** is **Kate Millet** who is an American feminist writer, artist and activist. Millett is best known for her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) marks a moment when "**Second Wave"** feminism becomes a highly visible, self-aware and activist movement. Millett held the view that economic inequality is the cause of women's oppression. This was an argument which opened up **"Second Wave"** thinking about reproduction, sexuality and representation (especially verbal and visual 'images of women', and particularly pornography). Millett's title, *Sexual Politics*, announces her view of 'patriarchy', which she sees as pervasive and which demands 'a systematic overview as a political institution'. She opined that patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women. She borrows from social science the important distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', where sex is determined

biologically but 'gender' is a psychological concept, which refers to *culturally* acquired sexual identity. She recognises that women as much as men perpetuate these attitudes and the acting-out of these sex-roles in the unequal and repressive relations of domination and subordination is what Millett calls 'sexual politics'.

Sexual Politics was a pioneering analysis of masculinist historical, social and literary images of women. Millett's privileging of *literature* as a source helped to establish writing, literary studies and criticism as domains especially appropriate for feminism. One crucial factor in the social construction of femininity is the way literary values and conventions have themselves been shaped by men, and women have often struggled to express their own concerns through many 'inappropriate' forms. In narrative, for instance, the shaping conventions of adventure and romantic pursuit have a 'male' impetus and purposiveness. Further, historically the male writer has tended to address his readers as if they were men, while much contemporary advertising provides obvious parallel examples in mass culture. In order to resist indoctrination of the female reader, Millett exposes the oppressive representations of sexuality to be found in male fiction. By deliberately foregrounding the view of a *female* reader, she highlights the male domination, which pervades sexual description in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet, offering in the case of Lawrence, for example, often hilarious and devastatingly deflationary analyses of his phallocracy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In What ways, is the "Second Wave" Feminism different from the "First Wave"?

Q 7: Discuss "Gynocriticism".

Q 8: What does Kate Millet state about sex and gender?

12.4.3 Third Wave Feminism

"Third Wave" Feminism is influenced and informed by Postmodern theory, as well as other anti-foundationalist discourses, such as Post colonialism and Post structuralism. It is sometimes conflated with an ambiguous and contested term Postfeminism that has two key meanings within an academic context. It is sometimes used to describe feminism's connection with Post structuralist, Postmodernist, and Postcolonial theorizing. However, another notion of Postfeminism implies that (radical) feminism is outdated and no longer a productive practice for a society which offers women varied channels of expression.

What has been described as a **"Third Wave"** of feminist activity and theorizing emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Moving away from **"Second Wave"** feminist identity politics, **"Third Wave"** feminist ideas about identity embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity, and emphasise the need for new feminist modalities in the twenty-first century. Following the decline of organised "Second Wave" activities in the 1980s, different accounts of feminism from **Black and Third World** women began to readdress the First World bias of the First and Second waves. These differing positions, alongside developments in the fields of Gender Studies, Postcolonial Theory, Queer Theory, and Postmodernism, inform "**Third Wave"** feminism, which accordingly takes a more global and plural view of the relationship between power and subjectivity.

However, within feminist circles themselves, there are political differences and conflicts of interest among coloured and white women, women from different classes, women of different sexualities, women belonging to different nations and groups, and women who are liberals, conservatives, radicals, and revolutionaries. For example, **Black women** have complained that white middle-class women, in academia as well as in the mass media, often end

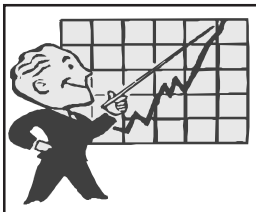
up speaking for feminism or for all women, even though they tend to represent only their own interests; **Third world women**, feel similarly silenced and unrepresented in mainstream social agendas, which rarely consider their needs or issues; **Lesbian women** have likewise organised themselves to ensure that their voices are heard. The "politics of difference" opens onto a world of differences and multiple identities among and within women themselves. **Queer Theory,** on the other hand, has attacked the homophobic and patriarchal basis o£ heterosexuality. It aims beyond lesbian and gay rights philosophies to study other so-called perverse, deviant, and alternative sexualities.



LET US KNOW

Identity Politics:

One of the important points among feminist critics has been **identity politics**, by which is meant a politics of difference based on some fixed or definable identity (as a middle-class white woman, a working class black woman, a third world woman, and so on). Critics of identity politics have several major complaints. They argue that defining feminist identity by giving priority to race, class or geography tends to essentialise these features, reducing people to social indicators whose "real essence" is determined by race or class or country of origin. Advocates of the politics of difference however, respond to identity politics by stating that the act of herding all women into one homogeneous category (often called women) is a reductive totalisation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is "Third Wave" Feminism?

Q10: What are the different groups that are reacting against the traditional feminist circles?

12.5 OTHER TRENDS OF FEMINISM

12.5.1 Socialist/Marxist Feminism

Socialist/Marxist feminism was a powerful strand of the "Second Wave" during the late 1960s and 1970s, in Britain in particular. It sought to extend the Marxist analysis of class into the history of women's material and economic oppression, and especially into how the family and women's domestic labour reproduce the sexual division of labour. Like other 'male' forms of history, it is assumed that Marxism had ignored much of women's experience and activity, and the primary task of Marxist feminism was to open up the complex relations between gender and economy. Juliet Mitchell's early essay, "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966), was a pioneering attempt to historicise the structural control patriarchy exerts over women in terms of their reproductive functions. Similarly, Sheila Rowbotham, in *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), recognised that working-class women experience the double oppression of the sexual division of labour both at work and in the home, and that Marxist historiography had largely ignored the domain of personal experience, and particularly that of female culture. Michèle Barrett, in *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (1980), presents a Marxist feminist analysis of gender representation. **First**, she applauds Virginia Woolf's materialist argument that the conditions under which men and women *produce* literature are materially different and influence the form and content of what they write: we cannot separate questions of gender-stereotyping from their material conditions in history. This means that liberation will not come merely from changes in culture. **Second**, the ideology of gender affects the way the writings of men and women are read and how canons of excellence are established. **Third**, feminist critics must take account of the *fictional* nature of literary texts and not indulge in 'rampant moralism' by condemning all male authors for

the sexism of their books and approving all women authors for raising the issue of gender.

12.5.2 French Feminism

Though it was Simone de Beauvoir, who infused a lot of seminal ideas to Feminism, yet, the phrase 'French Feminism' usually refers to a branch of feminist thinkers in France from the 1970s to the 1990s. French feminist theoreticians in particular, in seeking to break down conventional, male constructed stereotypes of sexual difference, have focused on **language as at once the domain in which such stereotypes are structured**, and evidence of the liberating sexual difference which may be described in a specifically 'women's language'. Literature is one highly significant discourse in which this can be perceived and mobilised. French Feminism has been deeply influenced by Psychoanalysis, especially by Jacques Lacan's reworking of Freud. A number of French Feminists have argued that female sexuality is a subterranean and unknown entity, which can nevertheless represent itself in literary writing. Hélène Cixous is a creative writer and philosopher who argues for a positive representation of femininity in a discourse she calls **'Ecriture Féminine'**, and her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) is a celebrated manifesto of 'women's writing' which calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing.

Unlike Virginia Woolf who abandoned the struggle to speak of the female body, Cixous writes ecstatically of the teeming female unconscious: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.' The female imagination is infinite and beautiful; the truly liberated woman writer, when she exists, will say: I . . . overflow; my desires have invented new desire, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again . . . I have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. Since writing is the place where subversive thought can germinate, it is especially shameful

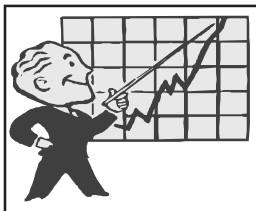
that the phallocentric tradition has, for the most part, succeeded in suppressing woman's voice. Woman must uncensor herself, recover 'her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal'; she must throw off her guilt (for being too hot or too frigid, too motherly or too unmaternal)."

But the heart of Helen Cixous' theory is her rejection of the idea that women's writing 'will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system'. This liberating return to the 'Good Mother' is the source of Cixous' poetic vision of women's writing, and it opens the possibility of a new type of sexuality. She opposes the sort of neutral bisexuality espoused by Virginia Woolf, and advocates instead what she calls 'the other bisexuality', which refuses to 'annul differences but stirs them up'. Cixous' approach is essentially and strategically visionary, imagining a possible language for the women rather than describing an existing one.

Luce Irigaray's *Spéculum de l'autre femme (or Speculum of the Other Women)* (1974) develops, in more rigorously philosophical terms, ideas which resemble Cixous'. She considers that patriarchal oppression of women is founded on the type of negative constructions associated with Freud's theory of female sexuality. The concept of 'penis envy', for example, is based upon a view of woman as man's 'Other', lacking the penis which he possesses (precariously). She is not viewed as existing at all except as a negative mirror-image of a man. In this sense, women are invisible to the male gaze and can only achieve a sort of phantasmal existence in hysteria and in mysticism.

The French-Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva's consideration of 'feminity' under patriarchy is somewhat different. Her consideration of feminity as marginality offers a position and not a definition. She refuses to define 'feminity'. In Kristeva's terms, it is simply that "which is marginalised by patriarchal symbolic order." This consideration of femininity in relational perspective is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself.

It is therefore important to note the different trajectories of what we call Feminist Criticism under French Feminism. You will do well if you read some the important essays of the French feminist critics from David Lodge's book Modern Criticism and Theory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What do you understand by the "Ecriture feminine"?

Q 12: How does Luce Irigaray propose to uphold female sexuality?

12.6 RECEPTION OF FEMINISM

Feminism in general is concerned with the representation of women in literature and with changing the position of women in society by setting them free from all types of oppressive restraints of the patriarchal society. However, one needs to make all possible attempts to understand how contemporary feminist criticism has new things to say. The publication of the book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar had helped to locate women's experience at the center of attention. Following this, some other feminists wanted to focus the debate entirely on the political issues. However, other writers like the French theorists Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray, began to pay attention to the nature of 'woman herself'. As you are already told, their works introduced further challenges to the established ideas of feminism and raised complex questions about our understanding of human subjectivity and its relationship to language. While doing so they were both influenced by and reacting against the Deconstruction of Jacques Derrida and Psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. Although critics like Alice Jardine, Mary Jacobus and Jacqueline Rose produced feminist criticism within this deconstructive and psychoanalytic framework, many also criticised the French perspectives as remote from practical and political end.

An interesting theoretical turn came into feminist criticism during 1980s when the ideas of Michel Foucault and New Historicism were effectively used by works done by Feminists. Critics like Catherine Gallaghar,

Nancy Armstrong, Gillian Beer, Mary Poovey and others considered gender and class relations within 19th century society. No doubt, they were influenced by the discussion of identity and gender in Deconstruction, Lacanian Psychoanalysis and New Historicism. Another extension of Feminism could be seen in the rise of **gay** and **lesbian** criticism, which developed in part in response to the early phases of Feminism, which was based largely on the experiences of white, middle class heterosexual women and to offer that experience as universal. This directly challenged the traditional views of sexuality.

However, when we look at the reception of feminism, we find that the position reached now is no longer straightforward. Feminist criticism thus works with a shifting agenda of endlessly acknowledging the complexity of the past and the limits of interpretations in contemporary times. The Third Wave model has also come under criticism for forcing inauthentic cut-off points within the movement, and for alienating current feminists from their feminist precursors. Nonetheless, the tendency of feminist criticism to deconstruct its own theories is undoubtedly a strength of the movement.



12.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have realised that Feminism in general has a long political history, developing in America and Britain throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. You must also have learnt that there is no one Feminism but there are different Feminisms. The Women's Rights and Women's Suffrage movements were the crucial determinants in shaping the early phase. Then, Feminism has been seen in terms of its different waves. You must have realised that Feminist theory is the extension of Feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. Feminist theory mainly aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. The American theorist Elaine Showalter describes the

development of feminist theory as having three phases: the first being "feminist critique" in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena; the second being "gynocriticism", in which the "woman is producer of textual meaning"; and the last phase being "gender theory", in which the "ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system are explored". Such phases were paralleled by French Feminism and Marxist Feminism.



12.8 FURTHER READING

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Links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Feminism takes into considerations the different campaigns, activities, and texts concerned with challenging and transforming the ways women are treated and represented in society. It is in fact a political movement and discourse that encompass a diverse range of perspectives, theories, and methods. Besides analysing patriarchal set up, Feminist theory seeks to propose new ways of 'reading' women to bring about social change.

Ans to Q 2: The **"First Wave"** dates from the end of the 18th century through the beginning of Suffragette (1918-28) and New Women's movements in Britain and the US…. … the **"Second Wave"** begins from 1960s with collective campaign on issues like sexual health and contraception, domestic abuse, and gender discrimination in the workplace and so on… …"Third Wave" is marked by the emergence of three different models: Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, and Socialist Feminism.

Ans to Q 3: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929)… …Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics … …*Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch… …*Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976)… …Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own*, *British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977)… …and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979).

Ans to Q 4: Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas… …*Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).

Ans to Q 5: Virginia Woolf is often considered 'the founding mother of the contemporary debate'… …*A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three*

Guineas (1938) are her important contributions to Feminist criticism—the first focussing on the history and social context of women's literary production, and the second on the relations between male power and the professions like law, education, medicine, etc…. …Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) established with great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism.

Ans to Q 6: "Second Wave" feminism and feminist criticism are very much a product of the liberationist movements of the mid-to-late 1960s. Although it continues to share the "First Wave's" fight for women's rights in all areas, its focal emphasis shifts to the politics of reproduction, to women's 'experience', to sexual 'difference' and to 'sexuality', as a form of oppression as well as something to celebrate.

Ans to Q 7: Gynocriticism concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's own culture. ... ...Elaine Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' to describe literary criticism based in a feminine perspective… …she described the concept in her *Toward a Feminist Poetics.*

Ans to Q 8: Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, announces her view of 'patriarchy', which she sees as pervasive and which demands 'a systematic overview as a political institution'… …she makes important distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', where 'sex' is determined biologically but 'gender' is a psychological concept which refers to *culturally* acquired sexual identity.

Ans to Q 9: "Third Wave" Feminism is influenced and informed by Postmodern theory, Postcolonialism and Poststructuralism… …Moving away from "Second Wave" feminist identity politics, "Third Wave" feminist ideas about identity embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity, and emphasise the need for new feminist modalities in the twenty-first century.

Ans to Q 10: Black women have complained that white middle-class women often end up speaking for feminism or for all women, even though they tend to represent only their own interests… …Third world women,

feel similarly silenced and unrepresented in mainstream social agendas, which rarely consider their needs or issues… …Lesbian women have likewise organised themselves to ensure that their voices are heard… … Queer Theory has attacked the homophobic and patriarchal basis of heterosexuality.

Ans to Q 11: Hélène Cixous is a creative writer and philosopher who argues for a positive representation of femininity in a discourse she calls **'Ecriture Féminine'**, and her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) is a celebrated manifesto of 'women's writing' which calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing.

Ans to Q 12: Luce Irigaray's in her *Speculum of the Other Women* (1974) considers that patriarchal oppression of women is founded on the type of negative constructions associated with Freud's theory of female sexuality… …he concept of 'penis envy', for example, is based upon a view of woman as man's 'Other'.



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the different waves of feminism? How do the feminist critics raise their voice against the stereotyping of women?

Q 2: What is the scope of feminist theory and criticism? Discuss with reference to the various phases of Feminism.

Q 3: Who are the major exponents of the First Wave Feminism? Discuss their major contributions to the development of feminist criticism.

Q 4: How did the Second Wave and Third Wave Feminism deviate from the main concerns of the First Wave?

Q 5: Write a comprehensive note on the idea of French Feminism with reference to their radical concerns.

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UNIT 13: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND QUEER THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Introducing the Concepts of Gender, Sexuality and the Queer,

13.4 Major Thinkers

13.5 Implications in Literary Studies

13.6 Let us Sum up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.9 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with the feminist and queer movement.
- list the key feminist and queer theorists and their major works.
- explain the concept of gender and gender studies.
- understand the concept of sexuality and the three types of sexuality.
- explain the terms related to queer theory.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is based on a discussion on Gender, Sexuality and Queer Theory. Pages of history bring to light how knowledge, power, and agency play an important role in promoting hegemonic discourses of patriarchy (ruled by the patriarch/father) and heterosexuality. The knowledge systems, over the years, have inscribed or promoted an ideology where man is considered to be the superior gender in comparison to woman. These knowledge systems, relying on its sources, have a significant role in maintaining the hegemonic gender discourse. This same knowledge system promoted the gender discourse of the two sexes corresponding to two

genders; male for masculine and female for feminine. Hence, traditional societies have recognised only two types of gender roles corresponding with their biological sexes, masculine for male and feminine for female. This socially constructed gender role is assigned to them at birth. As the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir in her groundbreaking text *The Second Sex* (1949) says "one is not born a woman, one becomes one…It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature…which is described as feminine." (267). The works of other feminist such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Betty Friedman, Kate Millett, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, in their quest towards woman's emancipation, tried to locate how knowledge systems promoted patriarchy which was distinctively repressive towards other genders. Thus, the feminist movement started questioning the dominant knowledge systems and it was followed by the queer movement, which can be seen to have emerged out of feminist thought, the only difference being, while feminism follows a feminist agenda, queer follows a much broader, postmodern perspective, which by breaking structures, tries to embrace change and non-binaries. By the end of this unit, we shall learn that the most common characteristic of the feminist, as well as queer theorists, are questioning the origins of patriarchy, starting with the definition of the commonly used terms, 'gender' and 'sexuality'.

13.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPTS OF GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE QUEER

Gender:

The biological and anatomical identity of an individual is one's 'sex' and 'gender' is the social 'layer' on the sex, manifesting itself as being masculine or feminine. Sex is determined by anatomy and is the 'act' of being male, female or transsexual/intersexual, whereas, gender is not determined by anatomy or at birth but is a social construct along with being the 'state' of being male or female with regards to social and cultural differences, i.e., masculine or feminine. Gender being a social construct, it is diverse, varied and is multiple in nature and is dependent on historical

and cultural factors. According to some critics, gender has multiple characteristics which include 'sex', social roles or gender identity.

Traditional societies have recognised only two types of gender roles corresponding with their biological sexes, masculine for male and feminine for female. This socially constructed gender role is assigned to them at birth. Such systems are called 'gender binary'. The ones existing outside such systems is called 'gender non-binary' or 'genderqueer.'

A significant aspect is a person's 'gender identity', absolutely invisible and personal, it is the individual's internal and intensely felt sense of being as either a man or a woman or in between, or something entirely different. Gender identity is completely individualistic and private whereas gender expression is external and socially professed. It refers to a personal identification with a particular gender and gender role in society. The problem arises when the gender and social roles are categorised and forced upon the individuals of the society. The interaction between sex, gender, and sexuality has given rise to multitudinous understandings on desire. This multiplicity encompasses difference, race, gender, and sexuality, among others.

Gender studies, thereby analyse the varied "conceptions of gender and their role in the writing, reception, subject matter, and evaluation of literary works." (Abrams 119) It is an interdisciplinary field that includes women's studies, men's studies and queer studies.

Sexuality:

Sexuality, at the very basic level, refers to a person's sexual orientation or preference, towards individuals of the same or different sexes. There are, predominantly, three types of sexuality or sexual orientations, namely, homosexuality or towards the same sex/gender, second, heterosexuality or towards the opposite sex/gender and third, towards both sexes/genders. While a 'lesbian' is a woman who is attracted emotionally and sexually to individuals of the same sex or gender, which does not necessitate having sexual experiences, a 'gay' is a man who is attracted to other men. On the other hand, 'bisexual' refers to those people who are attracted to both males and females, though there may be a preference for

one gender over the other. 'Transsexual' is someone who changes his or her sex through medical procedures including surgery and/or hormonal therapy. 'Intersexual' refers to people who are born with a mixture of both male and female hormonal, chromosomal and/or genital characteristics (Srivastava 370).

The complication arises when people fail to comprehend this multiplicity and instead observe the gender binary based on archaic systems of discourse, knowledge and understanding. Such systems presuppose the idea that there are only two genders vis-a-vis male/female or masculine/feminine and that a person must strictly follow their gender roles and social codes, failing which has its consequences. To quote Maya Sharma from *Loving Women: Being Lesbian in Unprivileged India,* "those who violate these 'gender' roles and codes are categorised as transgressive, condemned as obscene, and perceived as appropriate subjects for various forms of persecution and punishment"(1-2).

Queer:

Queer Theory can be said to be an academic revolt which rose as a reaction against the hegemony of heterosexuals on what is to be considered as the norm of normalcy, with regard to sex, gender and sexuality – 'sex' (the act of being male, female or transsexual), 'gender' (the state of being male or female with regards to social and cultural differences) and 'sexuality' (a person's sexual preference). Thus it includes any variation which is considered unnatural to the dominant system of sexual classification, the many types of sexual non-conformity, be it gays/lesbians, cross-dressers, trans-sexualism, bisexualism, sadomasochism, butch/femme, etc. It questions what seems to be the dominant understanding of sexuality, gender, sex, identity or difference, and sameness. It thus places itself against the 'normal' rather than only the heterosexual. The term 'Emergent' has often been associated with queer theory to describe a growing scholarly field.

Queer theory, as it is today, has been deeply influenced by Michel Foucault's notions of power (and agency), as well as Judith Butler's analysis of 'performativity of gender' (23) with the collation of sex and gender, such

that there is no identity of sex without gender, apart from being influenced by the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lee Edelman, Teresa de Lauretis, among others. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler writes, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results," (23) where she differentiates performance from performativity. Performance presupposes a pre-existing subject; whereas performativity challenges the notion of a subject itself, such that the 'gender acts' create the subject. Moreover, language is the medium through which gender identities are created. "Bodies are produced," according to Butler, in such a way that the performative aspect of gender, reinforced through repeated acts, is what creates the body (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 134-135).

'Queer' can function as a noun, an adjective or a verb but in each case is defined against the 'Normal' or normalising, as Tamsin Spargo states in *Postmodern Encounters: Foucault and Queer Theory*. Queer theory is not a singular concept but a precinct where multiple unorthodox structures, diverse relations and a range of engagements play out between sex, gender, and sexual desire. As an umbrella term for LGBTIQ people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered People, and Intersex, Queer), 'Queer' is also a political utterance as well as an orientation which promotes breaking binary thought and advocates the multiple. It 'indicates a transgressive desire of all sorts, and enables a questioning of the supposed naturalness of the heterosexual identity' (Menon 110). The queer space emerged out of heterogeneous and multiple works that reflected the conflicts in society, beginning with gay intolerance and homophobia, lesbian hatred across the home and the workplace, to lesbian and gay politics across urban and rural diasporas.

Consequently, queer theory being a reaction against the hegemonic discourse of gender and knowledge systems, while investigating the relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality, examines the exclusions otherwise implicit in a heterosexual/homosexual opposition. In this process, transgender identities become a feasible cultural possibility (Namaste 221).

The very idea of transgender is a process of cross-fertilization across the structured divide and the indeterminate nature of that process. Furthermore, transgender is independent of sexual orientation and has more to do with psychological gender disposition and gender identity. Since its earliest formulations (the 1990s), the figure of the transgender has been imperative to Queer theory. Jay Prosser, best known in queer studies for his work on transgender studies interrogates how queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of the transgender since queer theory represented itself as traversing and mobilising methodologies and identities (Prosser 33). Moreover, the metaphor of crossing was most often impacted with by the transgendered subject's crossing their several boundaries at once, both the boundaries between gender, sex and sexuality and the boundary that structures each as a binary category, thus challenging the notion of gender as a biological or social construct. At a very elementary level, transgender because of the obvious prefix 'trans' suggests a difference from the genre or phenomenon understood as gender. Though the term 'transgender' was first used in the field of psychology by psychiatrist John F. Oliven of Columbia University, the lexical compound of 'trans+gender' was put to work and popularised by pioneering activist Virginia Prince in the 1960s. Prince coined the term 'transgenderist' to distinguish 'heterosexual' male-crossdressers from the 'transsexuals' and the 'homosexuals' in the 1970s. Later in the 1990s, transgender took a new life as a broad term including gender non-binaries and non-conforming people. Hence due to its prefix 'trans', it invites comparisons with the term 'gender' through a medium of difference, where 'gender' signifies the state or condition of being male or female, used with reference to social and cultural differences instead of biological. Though the term 'transgender' was initially used as a conjoined word 'trans+gender' where 'trans' was used as a prefix to gender and not as a verb, it indicated gender transverse or traversing gender, in other words, it involves going beyond what constitutes gender.

This fluidity, changeability, multiplicity and transgressiveness of the LGBTIQ community can precisely be encapsulated in the words of

Kannabiran for whom the LGBTIQ community's "counter-heteronormative assertions, foreground the ruptures, and implicitly or explicitly challenge the edifice of heteronormativity" (442). While 'Queer' is a broad term for the individuals who are 'not' heterosexuals and/or cis-genders, it at times overlaps with 'Transgender' which is also an umbrella term for individuals who are 'not' cis-genders, where cis-gender means identifying with the gender and sex, as was assigned at birth.

Thus, to conclude, the hegemonic discourse of patriarchy helped facilitate the hetero-patriarchal social order, which was reacted against by the feminist writers. Feminist thought, though like queer disrupts binarism in terms of gender, feminism assumes a feminist self. Though queer theory emerges out of feminism, it assumes a postmodernist agenda. Similar to the postmodernists, they tend to view the self as essentially arising out of discursive and deconstructive practices. It locates origins, exposes norms and hierarchies only to lead to the "deconstruction of the dominant central principle governing any structure" (Choudhury, *English Social and Cultural History* 304). By challenging the hegemony of heterosexuals and rigid definitions of gender and sexuality, they debunk hierarchies and offer space to varied gender choices, without privileging any. In addition, any attempt to define 'queer' would constitute a violation of its very character, for queer abhors fixity and celebrates fluidity, the undefined, the unheard.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What plays a vital role in promoting patriarchy and heterosexuality?

Q 2: Name some of the early feminist critics.

Q 3: What is the similarity between the feminist and the queer movement?

Q 4: How is the queer movement different from feminism?

Q 5: What do you understand by the term 'gender' and 'sex'?

Q 6: What is gender studies?

Q 7: Define sexuality.

Q 8: What are the three types of sexuality?

Q 9: What do you understand by 'gender identity' and 'gender expression'?

Q 10: Define queer and queer theory.

Q 11: How is the figure of transgender significant to queer theory?

13.4 MAJOR THINKERS

Queer theory, as it is today, has been deeply influenced by Michel Foucault's notions of power (and agency). Michel Foucault in his work *History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* observes that discourse is a mechanism for power and social control and through which knowledge, norms emerge, thereby validating only certain behaviours as culturally intelligible and acceptable, while marking out others as taboo and destabilising forces threatening social order. Discourse and knowledge play a very critical part in the creation of space as put forward by Foucault in his chapter "Of Other Spaces". Foucault gives examples of "real places," (24-7) or heterotopias (or spaces) in narratives where borders are transgressed, stories are generated, and events are unfolded outside the social order. Brothels, prisons, museums, cemeteries, theatres, museums, libraries are such examples. These examples of heterotopic sites are representative of spaces that are sites of larger cultural structures of crisis, deviation, incompatibility, juxtaposition, compensation, or continuity. (Friedman 199)

Another significant writer to critique foundations and question hegemonic gender discourse is Judith Butler who is controversially famous for her major works, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'* (1993). She is known for her analysis of 'performativity of gender' (23) with the collation of sex and gender, such that there is no identity of sex without gender. One of the pioneer voices to analyse the performative nature of the term 'queer' critically, Butler argues for a genealogical critique of 'queer', deconstructing how queer emerges as a site that raises questions about the possibilities of subversion, stability, multiplicity and variability with performativity. She differentiates performance (presupposes a pre-existing

subject) from performativity (challenges the notion of a subject itself, such that the 'gender acts' create the subject), all the while stressing how gender performance is both involuntary and imperfect.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is another revolutionary voice in the field of gender and queer theory whose all three influential publications dealt with the transgendered self and the deconstruction of heterosexuality. In *Between Men: English Literature and the Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) Sedgwick wrote that the beginning of normative heterosexuality depended on a degree of male identification and yet importantly the dismissal of this identification, with women as the object of desire. Thus by questioning origins and foundations, she exposes how heterosexuality has been constructed through the sublimation of a cross-gendered identification. Hence making visible this identification, the transgendered self became a key queer mechanism for deconstructing heterosexuality. In her second significant book *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick writes explicitly about this methodological function of transgender. Here she presents how transgender enters as a key figure in gender politics whereby it led to the development of a theory of (homo) sexuality distinct from feminism. Traversing feminism's view of gender, transgender demands a new theory of sexuality wherein a merge between gay men and lesbians occurs. Similarly, in her third radical book, *Tendencies* (1993) she begins with a figure of the transgender to summon the queer moment.

In the Indian Context, Gayatri Reddy in *With Respect To Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity In South India* (2006) challenges the marginalization and states that one cannot see queer simply through the lens of gender and sexual difference for at stake are questions of nationalism, citizenship, identity, religion, sex and economics. She traces how the queer communities in India including the Hijras were highly revered in ancient India and were recognised as "Tritiya Prakriti', an expression in Sanskrit that was used to define "third gender" in pre-colonial India, the term being taken from *Puranas*, Hindu texts and mythologies which defined them as encompassing any gender outside the dichotomous framework. Running on contrary lines is Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* where he critiques

colonialism and asserts how the Britisher's denial of India's golden past is another way of controlling the colonisers. Caught in this politics, the third gender lost its position and was relegated to the periphery during British colonial rule.

Colonialism, which started off with the initial mission of civilising the barbaric and non-West world by introducing the scientific temper and through Evangelism, also led to other faulty worldviews, as that of the superiority of the human over subhuman, masculine over feminine, adult over child, modern over savage or primitive, heterosexual over trans, thereby creating rigid binary opposites. Thus the colonisers, in order to authenticate their new imperialist identity, gave emphasis to the masculine, adult, heterosexual, modern in them, at the cost of the feminine, child-like, Trans, and the primitive.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Who are some of the major thinkers?

Q 13: Differentiate between performance and performativity, following Judith Butler.

Q 14: Define the term 'discourse' as stated by Michel Foucault.

Q 15: What do you understand by the term 'Tritiya Prakriti'? What is the history behind it?

13.5 IMPLICATIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

Literature and academia have a crucial role to play in queering structures and thereby interrogating centres. Concurrently, by critiquing foundations and questioning origins, it has the ability to re-read history to locate as well as render many forms of oppression and repression prevalent in society. Through the medium of literature, gender writers and queer theorists are able to speak about the marginalised sections and their secondary place in society. Writers within the queer spectrum, through the power of their pen, are narrating their varied experiences as well as occurrences and are aware of the immense potential of queer as a political

tool. Individuals from the LGBTIQ community started voicing and expressing through the genre of autobiography writing. These first-hand narratives epitomise their transition into society as well as emerge as a medium to advocate for their cause and community. It brings about transformation not only for their own identity but also enables the same for the community. Through their bodies, they are able to accept and express their true gender reality whereby the body symbolises the gendered self. All the experiences became a core of their life's essence and therefore, body-writing came not only as a cathartic medium but also an assertion of their rights, voices, and identities.

LET US KNOW



1. The culminating point for queer community in India is the verdict by a five-judge bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra. After centuries of being treated as social outcaste, the community won a landmark victory with the decriminalization of homosexuality by diluting Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the Supreme Court of India, ending the 158-year-old war and a historic moment for the LGBTIQ community on 7th of September, 2018.
2. In India, a range of transgender-related identities, such as Hijras, Aravanis, Kothis, Shiv Shaktis and Jogtas/Jogappas, among many others have existed since time immemorial. One look at Indian history and mythology makes it evident that their stories have been a prominent part of Indian culture and customs. In the ancient and sacred texts of the Vedas, individuals who were gender non-binary and did not conform to gender rules were mentioned, with gender variants being referred to as '*Prakriti-prakrti*,' or of the female nature, and '*Tritiya-Prakriti*' or the third gender.
3. Transgenders have been part of many Hindu mythologies and fables, their presence having informed many cultural traditions and practices in India even today. In the great epic *Ramayana*, hijras featured in the story during Lord Rama's 14-year exile.

4. The Hijras or the transgendered people of Tamil Nadu consider themselves descendants of the character Aravan, the son of Arjuna and Nagakanya, from the *Mahabharata*.
5. Under the Mughal Empire, transgendered people played an essential role in the palaces and courts. They were considered to be intelligent and trustworthy, and what actually gave them power in terms of social mobility was that they could access any part of the palace, including the queens quarters and harems where access was heavily monitored and restricted, and exclusive to the ruling patriarch, his wives, and female servants and so on.
6. At the time when the British first arrived in India, it was still common practice for hijras to receive gifts and benefits from some kingdom states in the Indian subcontinent. Hijras formed an essential part of cultural traditions and celebrations through song and dance, and offering their blessings on auspicious occasions. However, as the British gained administrative and political power, hijras were stripped of their land inheritance, having no way of proving their inheritance by blood.
7. The impact of colonial rule in India on the lives of hijra and queer community was profound, and it made living conditions very difficult. Having little understanding of cultural practices and traditions, the British failed to understand their unique cultural significance in the Indian social milieu, particularly with the royal families of India. In turn, the British began to scrutinise the mannerisms and behaviour of members of the community, along with their place in society. They put in place laws that criminalised homosexuality, such as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, making 'unnatural acts' punishable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 16: How do literature and academia play a crucial role in queering structures?



13.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to understand the concepts of gender, sexuality and queer theory along with the major thinkers. The twenty-first century can be seen as the moment of an assertion of queer people. For years, the LGBTIQ community has been subjected to oppression and discrimination by the hetero-patriarchal society. The Trans movement, led by various individuals and organizations, has been advocating for the community, to influence public opinion, through awareness programmes and social work. Educated Trans writers, through their autobiographies, are gradually beginning to narrate the sufferings of the people, and their exploitation by heteronormative society – the family, the police, and society, at large. This fight against inequality in sexes/genders is gaining momentum, but a long road lies ahead as Trans resistance involves resisting fundamental social and legal structures that dictate the everyday lived realities of non-conforming sexes. As Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan in their anthology *Because I Have a Voice* wrote, "This queer resistance is about questioning the fundamentals of our society" (40). As already discussed, viewing sex and gender, as a binary has been the traditional and conventional position, a view that further limits the possibilities available even to the sexually conforming men and women in resisting gender roles. As already seen, gender identity is entirely individualistic and private whereas gender expression is external and socially professed. However, it is through social meanings that have been associated with the body that it has become far more than a physical entity and a factor of its (sexual) desires; instead, every aspect of its being and expression, are assigned "social meanings attached to signifiers of sex and sexuality" (Gagné and Tewksbury 61). In fact, it could be argued that the very reason why sexuality is socially governed the way it is, is because of the gendered roles ascribed to it that are deeply connected to the fundamental institution – the family, which is in some senses the basic unit of a heteronormative patriarchal system, on which cultural norms and traditions are constructed.



13.7 FURTHER READING

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Other Sources:

The Danish Girl, dir. Tom Hooper, 2015 (film)

Normal.dir. Jane Anderson, 2003 (film)

Accepting Alternative Sexualities. Satyameva Jayate, 2014 (Documentary)

My Transgender Kid. Dir. Nick Sweeney and Emma Young, 2015 (Documentary)

Gender Revolution. Producer: Katie Couric, 2017 (Documentary)

India's Third Gender Movement. The Zainab Salvi Project. Huffington Post, 2016 (Documentary)

13.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Knowledge, power, and agency play an important role in promoting hegemonic discourses of patriarchy and heterosexuality. The knowledge systems, over the years, have inscribed or promoted

an ideology where man is considered to be the superior gender in comparison to woman.

Ans to Q 2: Some of the early feminist critics are Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Betty Friedman, Kate Millett, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others.

Ans to Q 3: Both tried to locate how knowledge systems promoted patriarchy, which was distinctively repressive towards other genders.

Ans to Q 4: While feminism follows a strictly feminist agenda, queer follows a much broader, postmodern perspective, which by breaking structures, tries to embrace change and other non-binaries.

Ans to Q 5: While the biological and anatomical identity of an individual is one's sex, gender is the social 'layer' on the sex, manifesting itself as being masculine or feminine. Sex is determined by anatomy and is the 'act' of being male, female or transsexual/intersexual, whereas, gender is not determined by anatomy or at birth but is a social construct and is the 'state' of being male or female with regards to social and cultural differences, i.e., masculine or feminine.

Ans to Q 6: Gender studies analyse the varied "conceptions of gender and their role in the writing, reception, subject matter, and evaluation of literary works." (Abrams 119)

Ans to Q 7: Sexuality, at the very basic level, refers to a person's sexual orientation or preference, towards individuals of the same or different sexes.

Ans to Q 8: There are, predominantly, three types of sexuality or sexual orientations, namely, homosexuality or towards the same sex/gender, second, heterosexuality or towards the opposite sex/gender and third, towards both sexes/genders.

Ans to Q 9: Gender identity, absolutely invisible and personal, is the individual's internal and intensely felt sense of being as either a man or a woman or in between, or something totally different. Gender identity is completely individualistic and private. Gender expression refers to

a person's identification with a particular gender and gender role in society. It is external and socially professed.

Ans to Q 10: Queer Theory can be said to be an academic revolt, which rose as a reaction against the hegemony of heterosexuals on what is to be considered as the norm of normalcy, with regard to sex, gender and sexuality. Queer is a methodology of critical thinking that by deconstructing the gender system questions the foundations.

Ans to Q 11: Queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of the transgender since queer theory represented itself as traversing and mobilising methodologies and identities (Prosser 33). Moreover, the metaphor of crossing was most often impacted with by the transgendered subject's crossing their several boundaries at once, both the boundaries between gender, sex and sexuality and the boundary that structures each as a binary category, thus challenging the notion of gender as a biological or social construct.

Ans to Q 12: Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayatri Reddy, among others.

Ans to Q 13: She differentiates performance (presupposes a pre-existing subject) from performativity (challenges the notion of a subject itself, such that the 'gender acts' create the subject), all the while stressing how gender performance is both involuntary and imperfect.

Ans to Q 14: Michel Foucault in his work *History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge* observes that discourse is a mechanism for power and social control and through which knowledge, norms emerge, thereby validating only certain behaviours as culturally intelligible and acceptable, while marking out others as taboo and destabilising forces threatening social order.

Ans to Q 15: The queer communities in India including the Hijras were highly revered in ancient India and were recognised as "Tritiya Prakriti', an expression in Sanskrit that was used to define "third gender" in pre-colonial India, the term being taken from *Puranas*, Hindu texts and mythologies which defined them as encompassing any gender outside the dichotomous framework.

Ans to Q 16: Literature and academia has a crucial role to play in queering structures and thereby interrogating centers since by critiquing foundations and questioning origins, it has the ability to re-read history to locate as well as render many forms of oppression and repression prevalent in the society.



13.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What do you understand by the term 'gender'? Elaborate.

Q 2: Discuss the three types of sexuality.

Q 3: What do you understand by the term 'Queer'? Elaborate.

Q 4: Assess the contribution of Michel Foucault in Gender and Queer Studies.

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UNIT 14: ECOCRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Introducing the Concept of Ecocriticism: History of Emergence

14.4 History of Emergence

14.5 Major Thinkers

14.6 Implications in Literary Studies

14.7 Let us Sum up

14.8 Further Reading

14.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.10 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss how Ecocriticism attempts to see 'nature' as a unique physical creation as well as a cultural discourse.
- read about how Ecocriticism studies the ecological representation in literature.
- spread general awareness about the environmental crisis as narrated in literary texts by highlighting and rethinking about our contemporary ecological concerns.
- understand the fact that social responsibility as the concerns of Ecocriticism is not individualistic or local but global.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall deal with the concept of 'Ecocriticism' a term coined by William Rueckert in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) which deals with ecology and its various concepts to the study of literature. Ecocriticism attempts to trace all possible relationship between literature and the ecological world. According to Rueckert, ecocriticism is the application of ecology and

ecological concepts to the study of literature. For Rueckert, ecocriticism is not just an interest in translating ecological concepts to the study of literature but an attempt to see literature in the context of an ecological vision. Thus, by the end of the unit, we shall be able to see how ecocriticism has been seen as the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

14.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF ECOCRITICISM

The sidelining of New Criticism since the 1960s has resulted in the foundation and reshaping of several theories like Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Reader response Theories, Postcolonialism, Marxism, Gender studies, Cultural materialism, New historicism and Psychoanalysis to name just a few. These critical approaches often clubbed together under the nomenclature 'Theory' have emerged as powerful and manipulative discourses that are in a constant state of flow and revision. In this flux, there has been a regular reshaping of boundaries to meet the newer challenges, desires and demands of the coming generations. Despite their essential differences, one common premise of most of these theories is that these focus on the humans as their centre of study and nothing outside them matters. The new wave of theories seems to have little concern for the ecological structures and its association with literature. This idea has been aptly captured in William Rueckert's significant essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978) where he states that literary criticism is an "endlessly dialectical process which helps to keep culture healthy and viable throughout history. Nothing about nature and the biosphere in all this."

In the contemporary world of theory, literature is not merely seen as the reflection of society but also as an active ideological agency shaping, challenging and reshaping cultural structures. In such orientations, it is often forgotten that the same literary texts also engage with nature in their own

overt and covert ways. Despite the overwhelming importance of nature in the human world and its constant presence in the literary writings, it has always been kept off the limits of mainstream critical and academic theories. This can be seen as a consequence of one of the dominant binary opposition rooted in Western civilization i.e. between humans and nature where humans occupied the place of the Self and nature perpetually gets Othered. However, during the 1970's, nature came to be regarded as an important area of study across the globe as a consequence of the rapid and unplanned development, industrialisation, world wars and the selfish actions of humanity that was blind to the rest of existence. This dire situation called in for urgency of awareness among humans, so that no further damage could be done to the ecology.

As a consequence, the study of ecological concerns got a formal and organised structure under the name of ecocriticism, which in today's world is seen as an important area of study despite its recent birth. Ecocriticism attempts to study the relationship between humans and nature in close proximity through the various literary narratives. William Rueckert in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), states the first law of Ecology, which is "Everything is connected to everything else". From this theorem, Rueckert states that ecocriticism needs to see even the smallest, most remote part in relation to a very large whole is the central intellectual action required by ecology and of an ecological vision.

The credit for coining the term 'ecology' in 1869 goes to the famous German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel who had founded the concept of biogenetics and was also the originator of the theorem, "ontogeny recapitulates phylogemy" (one organism's life repeats a species history). However, the concept of 'ecology' first appeared in English Literature in the year 1873 while the introduction of the term 'literary ecology' was done by the prolific writer, Joseph W. Meeker who in his influential work, *The Comedy of Survival: The Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) attempts to discover the roles played by literature and the environment. With this effort of Meeker, we see ecology enter into the world of literary and critical understanding as

a significant area of study, which for a long time since the advent of the age of Renaissance was considered to be an area of study for the natural and physical sciences.

The study of ecology by the scientific world of Renaissance was in the attempt to understand the mysteries of the natural world, which would thereafter enable humans to tame and control it for their benefits. However, the unpredictability and constantly changing boundaries of the natural world made it impossible to define it as a concept that could be studied as a result of which attempts to understand the dynamics of nature was undertaken by the school of social sciences and literature, whose politics of language and representation allowed the construction of the image of nature as a natural and cultural discourse.

As it is clear from the above discussions about the various contours of the term, a precise definition of ecocriticism is difficult to be penned down. It has several schools and positions associated with it like nature writings, ecofeminism, eco-theory, animal studies, green studies, bioregionalism—all of which attempt to challenge the canonical beliefs, so as to include unheard voices and also reinterpretation of canonical works of the past. These positions associated with the study of nature in literature, shows ecocriticism as a semi-overlapping project rather than a unitary approach to established claims. However, even as this school of thought has been described and labelled under several headings, all the ecocritical writers have a common point in their writings, a shared concern rising from the increasing awareness of the sensitive situation that humans have brought to themselves through their irreparable and destructive actions that have been rapidly depleting the quality of the ecology.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: 'The terminology of Ecocriticism is a gradual and natural outcome of several efforts to make readers become ecologically conscious.' Comment.

Q 2: Trace the events that paved way for the need of a critical theory called Ecocriticism.

14.4 HISTORY OF EMERGENCE

In the age of Antiquity, every aspect of the ecology was believed to have its own "genius loci", its guardian spirit which were accessible to men but unlike men. These spirits in the natural objects protected nature from men. This belief was the outcome of the prevailing ideologies of the social structure like animism and paganism which added the spiritual aspect to the understanding of nature. The period witnessed a nature centric attitude that fostered a mutual relationship of love, reverence and awe between the ecology and the humans. In fact, it was believed by Manes in his essay, "Nature and Silence" that all the phenomenal world was alive in the sense of being 'inspirited' not just by people, but also by animals, cultural artefacts, plants and even 'inert' entities. The nonhuman world was alive and filled with articulate subjects that were able to communicate with humans. The natural world was treated as a 'living organism' that co existed with mankind to make the daily life of humans easier as well as make human's survival and sustenance possible. The interconnectedness and interdependence of the natural world and humans was well balanced in more or less perfect harmony. The importance of the ecology in the lives of humans called for protection of the ecology making the natural world and humans shared a close-knit bond with each other.

The advent of Christianity and its dogma of creation revealed, "Since God made nature, nature also must reveal the divine mentality." This religious study of nature was called natural theology. Nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to men. According to the "Genesis", the natural world was created before the creation of humans who were created as an afterthought in the image of God. This eternal and permanent aspect of nature was further added to the biblical idea of the natural world as a paradise, divine like, diverse and unique creation, which added the religious element to the concept of nature. The Christian way of living slowly paved way for cultivation and domestication of the human life and the ecology with the rejection of animism and paganism which evaporated the 'spirits' of the ecology, thereafter giving humans the effective

monopoly to exploit the natural world. This soon fostered the urge to dominate and control the natural world, which was further encouraged by several social and religious ideologies like 'The Divine Rights of Kingship', 'Creation of Man in the image of God' and 'The Great Chain of Being'. These emphasised on the supremacy of humans over the natural world. In this regard, Christianity can be considered as the most anthropocentric religion. While many Christians identified the natural world as a blessing, others believed that nature was literally evil and therefore endorsed by God for utter exploitation and destruction, which was subtly hinted in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The sacredness of nature was overlooked and was also regarded as the space of hostility and mediation for the revelation of God's master plan.



LET US KNOW

Most literary writings of the medieval period were a celebration of the pastoral and wilderness through several literary techniques, like allegory, which attempted in instilling attributes of virtues and morality in the actions of man so as to help him attain heaven in his afterlife. This supremacy of the Church during the medieval period encouraged the preoccupation with the creation. Nature was seen as a means to understand God as well as act as a link for the ultimate creator and the created. This idea added the spiritual aspect to the understanding of nature.

The coming of Renaissance, along with humanism, reformation, print revolution and scientific revolution not only opened the gates for the modern world but also witnessed the distancing of humans from the natural world, which was the outcome of the anthropocentric attitude. The age saw several radical changes brought about by discoveries and innovations as well as the increasing corruption steeping into the church lead to the questioning of the truths upheld by the Church. The dominant spirit of the period was 'individualism' which when blended with the capitalistic aspirations drifted humans further away from the concerns of the natural

world. The project of colonialisation, which attempted to discover an unknown world, also involved exploiting and controlling of the natural resources for political and economical gains. This relationship between the natural world and humans has been narrated in several literary works of the age but the most prominent was William Shakespeare's *Tempest* (1611). The age witnessed the celebration and glorification of humans who were placed at the centre as against the earlier centrality of God and nature. However, it would be misleading to say none voiced about and for Nature. Saint Francis Assisi through his sincere efforts showed the importance of Nature for the survival and sustenance of both humans and nature in the future. He was the greatest radical in Christian world since Christ. He rebelled against the disruption of the global environment due to dynamic technology and science, which is why he was regarded as the "patron saint for ecologist".

The drifting away of man from nature further intensified during the later part of the seventeenth century, which saw nature as 'dead'. This idea has been mentioned in Frederick Turner's essay, "Cultivating the American Garden" where he states that "the Puritans likes his nature as spiritually dead as a doornail". This was a natural outcome of the Puritan attitude that stood for rigid and extreme morality and virtues. The second half of the seventeenth century had an instrumental perception of nature as stated by the eminent thinkers of this period like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Thomas Hobbes believed the 'state of nature' was primitive as against the human community which was formulated on safety and comfort, while John Locke suggested that humans must treat land as their private property as he believed that the non human world was valueless.

The eighteenth century witnessed the scientific, intellectual and industrial revolution that radically changed the social structure and deepened the path for anthropocentricism. This age of enlightenment was ruled by logic and reason. Most studies of this century were directed to the understanding of humans and culture as opposed to nature. Further, with the advent of industries, the age witnessed a steady decline in the quality of human life and the ecology. This ecological crisis was realised by few intellectuals like Comte de Buffon, Rousseau, Alexander Pope, Wolfgang

von Goethe who through their literary writings wanted to spread ecological awareness amongst the readers. In fact, one of the influential writing from this period about nature was Comte de Buffon's *Historie Naturelle,* which was very close to the modern understandings of ecological theories. It makes an attempt to study nature for its own sake rather than as "a key to any divine schema or clue to theological truth". In fact for Buffon, the natural world enjoys "perfect equality: they are neither slaves nor the tyrants to each other. The individual has no occasion, like man, to dread the rest of species". Rousseau in his *The Social Contract* says that the early man lived in a pure and benevolent state of nature whose existence was threatened not only by science, technology and industries but also by the 'single will' enforced by the state. For Rousseau, the wild and pristine was always held superior to the cultured and civilized which he called the concept of 'Noble Savage'.

For Alexander Pope, in his work *Essays on Man* following the philosophy of Kant shows the superiority of man over animals with the understanding that "An animal is not yet a complete being, because it is not conscious of itself" because animals cannot reason nor act autonomously. However, no being is capable of laying claim to the distinctions of being the final end of creation. In the natural world, every being were seen as equals. Pope reflected on the mounting interest in science of his days and also provided an ecological understanding that examines the place of man in the Great Chain of Being. The work extols the 'ample range' of God's creation, where animals were directed by sense and instinct while humans are governed by Reason. Animals, for Pope, "yearns to have humans' higher consciousness, but nature will not allow it". Few writings from this period also deals with the binary relationship of nature and culture wherein nature was regarded as wild, real, innocent, uncontrollable, natural and permanent while culture was regarded as polished, artificial, corrupt, progressive and sophisticated. This idea has been captured in the poem of Pope's "An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot", where nature was seen as an outside entity which has been pushed to the background in the narrative. Another important writer of this period was Wolfgang von Goethe who states that the study of nature should not be limited to man but should be done in its holistic totality.

Romanticism in literature was a definite reaction to industrialization. The Romantic period witnessed an increasing use of personifications and apostrophising the earth and all its components in literature that added literal as well as symbolic meaning to the literary texts. The main purpose of such a treatment of the natural world was in an attempt to create a homogeneous environment. However, it would be misleading to say that such efforts were 'ecocentric', as English poetry of the later eighteenth century "falls short of an authentically ecological understanding of the natural world" in fact, "it reflects an essentially touristic and hierarchical awareness centred on the most spectacular or 'sublime' aspects of nature". Nature was not only seen as a scientific object but also as an inspirational object for most writers who saw nature as a living organism with a 'spirit' that enlarged their imaginative, creative and intellectual capacities and also encouraged humans for the 'return to nature' with the need to preserve the natural world as well as discovery of the self . Nature was seen as an escape route from the corrupt, materialistic, competitive and industrialized society.

According to 1882's statement by Edmund Goose, Thomas Gray was the first romantic lover of nature but he was preceded by Thomas Burnett's poetic love for nature as shown in his *The Theory of the Earth* (1690). In fact, much claim of the romantic treatment of nature was given to James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730), which was regarded as an influential work that opened the world of romanticism that was later popularised by William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats and P. B. Shelley. In this age, nature was viewed as an aesthetic object that is also sublime, spiritual, picturesque, beautiful, primitive, and romantic. This opened the possibility of the ecological perspective in romantic poetry, which foregrounded nature in narratives.

The various thinkers of this age treated nature differently, each adding something new to the understanding of ecology, thereby making it an ever expanding concept. William Blake held an ambivalent attitude; in fact a divine hostility towards nature as he believed that nature had no hints or suggestions of God but was implanted by the mind on nature. For Blake,

"Nature is there for us to transform; it is neither a separate creation of God nor an objective counterpart of ourselves". Blake regarded nature as the work of the devil, stating, "The devil is in us, as far as we are Nature". Blake through his sincere attempts in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* reveals the devastating condition of nature brought about by industrial revolution that exploited natural world with hostility in pursuit of man's lust for a "developing commercial- industrial- capitalist society".

The practice of personification and anthropomorphism has been generally regarded as an unjustified representation of the non-human world. However, this age witnessed the popularisation of the trend of personification, which was used extensively by several romantic poets. This was no accident but an outcome to reduce the drift between humans and the natural world that had intensified due to the Industrial Revolution. The assigning of human sentiments and attributes to the non-human world was very unlike the previous ages that were based on abstract ideas. This encouraged humans to again see the neglected nature as a part of them.

For Wordsworth, Nature is sublime, beautiful, picturesque and spiritual. In fact, most of Wordsworth's writings celebrate the magnificence, beauty and bounty of nature. Although he used the literary technique of personification but he never did so regularly as his aim was never to 'humanize the natural world'. Like most of the Romantics, Wordsworth too responded to the Industrial Revolution by rejecting the scientific view of the mechanical universe. In fact, for Wordsworth, humans and nature are essentially adapted to each other. Nature, according to Wordsworth is spirited and living and is a teacher that is ready to impart 'spontaneous wisdom'. While on the one hand, Coleridge in his poems like "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" shows us his deep passion and reverence for nature, which has been untouched by humans and his machine. Keats glorified the simplistic beauty of nature that was permanent and eternal against the mundane and transcendental life of man. Though the English Romantics like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats were opposed to the Newtonian scientific materialism, many of these poets balanced this opposition with a deep interest in natural science.

The nineteenth century witnessed the crisis in the social structure with the scientific discoveries of Newton and Darwin namely, the origin of species, natural selection and the survival of the fittest mentioned in Darwin's most seminal work, *On the Origin of Species* (1859). According to Darwin, man and all other vertebrate animals have been constructed on the same general model and in this regard, he viewed all beings as important and equal as the extinction of any beings can drastically effect the survival and sustenance of the other beings in the ecology. These theoretical considerations of the scientific knowledge stood in complete opposition with the traditional truths upheld by Christianity for years. This tensional relationship between the scientific world and the religious world led to an utter confusion and chaos without any central force of unity and belief. Humans were not ready to give away the traditional beliefs nor were they ready to reject the modern scientific truths. In the absence of unity, humans turned to nature for balance and solace, which was 'greying' as a consequence of the corrupt and exploitative aspirations of the capitalistic and industrial man. Nature was given a pessimistic treatment, which has been aptly shown in several of Matthew Arnold's poems like 'Dover Beach' and *In Memoriam* (1850) as well as Dickens' novels like *Great Expectation* (1861) and *David Copperfield* (1850).

Other significant writers of this period treated the natural world in different ways, like Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and Jane Austen celebrated the countryside and its refreshing nature untouched by industries and cosmopolitanism. Ann Radcliffe added the elements of mystery, gothic and supernatural to nature and Mary Shelley through her novel, *Frankenstein* (1818) opened the way for scientific fiction that glorified the non-human world. The Bronte sisters brought nature to the foreground in their narrative making it take an important role of a character in their novels through which readers could easily trace the semi autobiographical elements in their works. The works of the Bronte sisters was not only in praise of the green lush nature but also a celebration of the wilderness and the moors.

The modern twentieth century has witnessed several anthropocentric actions like unplanned developments, population boom,

pollution, exploitation of natural resources, the horrific world wars, decolonialisation and Depression that has not only changed the social structure but also the political and economic structures of the period. This selfish anthropocentric approach towards the ecology has challenged the replenishing rate of nature. In this century, science was viewed not only as an agency of development but also a means of dominance and power politics, which can be seen with the advent of nuclear wars that nations are engaging to maintain their individual supremacy and sovereignty. The modern age is an age of digital advancement and technology where man has been spiritually dead and alienated living without any purpose and direction. The idea of nation and Constitution which lays great emphasis on individualism has drifted humans away from the natural world, while on the other hand, the policies and laws mentioned in the Constitutions has made man equal citizens of the natural world, thereby making humans socially responsible towards nature.

The radical developments and comforts of the twenty first century has drastically changed the lifestyle of the modern man who no longer see nature, red in tooth and claw; for a man is much less likely now to perish from the heat or cold, to starve for want of food; his formerly intolerable dependency on the caprices of Nature is no longer so Gross; his relation to the other animals and to the vegetable creations appears thickly veiled- by air conditioning, frozen foods, washing machines, detergents, automobiles, electric blankets and power lawnmowers".

The increasing consumption of frozen and canned foods, living a 'in-door' culture, controlled by digital gadgets which has become an addiction in the human life has led to the minimal contact of humans with nature. This has changed the nature- centric approach to an anthropocentric way of living where humans have failed to protect and acknowledge the importance of the natural world. In fact, the modern man enters nature for adventures and ecotourism. The modern man shows himself as ecologically conscious who hesitates to act for the benefits of nature by sacrificing the needs, comforts and luxurious of the self, which makes the modern man, a shallow and an artificial individual for whom the importance of the self is the

most central. Most writings of this age situate nature to the background in their narratives. The period has witnessed several writings like *Silent Spring, The Country and the City* and *The Machine in the Garden* that have successfully voiced the sensitive ecological crisis as well as highlight the concerns of a modern man who is alienated, transcendental and disaporic, trying to seek an identity in an ambivalent and hybrid world of globalisation, digitalisation and neo-colonialism.

The growing concern and increasing awareness of the importance of ecological concerns led to the Western Literature Association meeting held in the year 1992, to become a remarkable event in the field of ecocriticism. This resulted in the eventual birth of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) with Scott Slovic as the first elected President. The mission of ASLE was "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world and to encourage new nature writings, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature and interdisciplinary environmental research". Within a year, the size of the members of ASLE grew to more than three hundred, which doubled in the second year. This increase reflected not only the spread of awareness of the environmental crisis, but also an earnest attempt to do something to save the ecology and humankind. In the year 1993, ASLE published its own journal under the esteemed leadership of Patrick Murphy named *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment,* which became an important forum for critical and scholarly studies of literature and other disciplines addressing environmental considerations. It provided encouragement for the development of new ideas and strategies concerning ecology across the globe. It also played a significant role in channelizing the spirit and concerns of ecocriticism towards a progressive direction.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 3: Trace the treatment of Nature during the age of antiquity.

Q 4: **'**Christianity has been regarded as the most anthropocentric religion.' Comment.

Q 5: Highlight the role played by the Western Literature Association of 1992 in the founding of ecocriticism.

14.5 MAJOR THINKERS

In this section, we shall acquaint ourselves with the most influential eco critical thinkers over the years who have not only contributed to the emergence of ecocriticism as a critical discipline but has also made the contemporary generations ecologically conscious.

The most significant eco critical thinker is **John Meeker** who brought the concept of ecology under the lens of theoretical study with the first introduction of the term 'literary ecology' in his influential work, *The Comedy of Survival: The Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) which attempts to discover the roles played by literature and the environment. It is a founding works of ecocriticism that spans across many centuries and analyzes the "comedy of survival" as a core to the ecological concept through the study of the two literary forms- tragedy and comedy. With this effort of Meeker, we see ecology enter into the world of literary and critical understanding as a significant area of study, which for a long time with the advent of the age of Renaissance was considered to be an area of study for the natural and physical sciences.

The term 'Ecocriticism' was coined by **William Rueckert** in his seminal essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), which deals with ecology and its various concepts to the study of literature. He was not just interested in transferring ecological concepts to the study of literature but seeks to see literature inside the context of an ecological vision. In this essay, Rueckert deals with everything associated to the ecological vision including literary and non-literary aspects and narrations, as he believes that without an ecological vision, people will perish. He therefore states that this ecological vision must penetrate the economic, political, social and technological visions of our times and radicalise them, as the ecological problem is not national but global and planetary.

In the significant essay "Some Principles of Ecocriticism", **William Howarth** implies ecocriticism to be more ecologically literary. The essay is the study of the basic ideas associated to ecocriticism. According to the essay, the terms 'Eco' and 'Critic' are derived from Greek words 'oikos' and 'krits' meaning "house judge". For Howarth, an eco critic is "a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating Nature, berating its despoilers and reversing their harm through political actions". He further states that ecocriticism is a concept derived from four disciplines- ecology, an interdisciplinary science that describes the relationship between nature and culture; ethics, which attempts to offer ways to mediate historic social conflicts; language, which examines how words represent human and non-human life; and criticism, which judges the quality and integrity of works and promotes their dissemation. Each discipline stresses on the relationship between nature and literature as a shifting and changing space, which is standing in progress, unfinished. The essay contains a mini and basic library consisting on the wide issues associated with ecocriticism as well as its relationship with other disciplines like natural sciences, geography, social sciences, literature and media, history and American studies.

Greg Garrad has written the most ambitious and foundational works of Ecocriticism, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* which contains thirty four chapters giving us a wide range of areas to consider like Renaissance, children's literature, modernism, postmodernism, music, film, religion, medicine, new materialism and queer theory to name a few. Although the work is pre dominantly, Western in its perspective but it also focuses on what ecocriticism looks like in India, China, Japan and Africa. It shows the diverse vision of ecocriticism by stating that if environment is everything, than there is no bound to the domain of this ambitious project. Another significant work of Garrad is *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* which explores a wide range of ideas like pollution, pastoral, wilderness, nature, dwelling, apocalyptic narratives and animal studies covering their treatments from the ancient period to the contemporary world of digitalisation where cyborg culture is taking an significant hold in the world of theory. It's a basic

guide that deal with important concepts associated to ecocriticism like Environmentalism, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, Eco Marxism and Social Ecology along with a chapter devoted to the future prospects of Ecocriticism.

Cheryll Glotfelty along with his co editor Harold Fromm published the most important anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* with the most classic eco writings that has touched all possible aspects of ecocriticism. It introduces readers to the emerging world of ecocriticism, which is ever exploring and ever expanding. While Lawrence Coupe in his work, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism,* a comprehensive collection of essays attempts to draw a connection between ecology, culture and literature; Graham Huggan in his work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism:Literature, Animals*, *Environment* co edited by Helen Tiffin deals with the close relationship shared between colonialism and the ecology by mentioning the play of politics of development, entitlement, myth, religion, animals, representation and space. Further Timothy Clark in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment,* provides an introductory overview of literary and cultural criticism that concerns the environmental crisis. The work is a thought provoking book that challenges our conventional thinking. It deals with several core as well as untouched issues of Ecocriticism. It can be broadly divided into the four sections, namely romantic and anti romantic, the boundaries of politics, science and the struggle for intellectual authority and the animal mirror.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the contributions made by William Rueckert to Ecocriticism?

Q 7: "Most eco critics share the same ecological dilemma although their approaches may vary." Comment.

14.6 IMPLICATIONS IN LITERARY STUDIES

This section will lay emphasis on the increasing influence of ecocriticism in the academic and theoretical world. Ecocriticism has touched upon most major theoretical approaches and has thereafter

modified their boundaries a well as redefined its own boundaries. This flexible tendency of ecocriticism that deals with important global concerns has greened up other disciplines as the presence of ecology is found in most critical disciplines. The drawing of 'green' to other theoretical approaches helps us to understand the complex concerns and problems of ecocriticism better so as to bring all relevant changes to help man reverse the destructive and exploitative actions of man to nature. It adds significance to the different disciplines that ecocriticism draws from, thereby expanding the limits of knowledge and theories of the theoretical world.

The world has always been viewed in binary relationship so as to make meaning possible which is why the concept of 'Othering' should not be only limited to postcolonial studies which was given a proper shape under the hands of Edward Said in his famous work, *Orientalism* (1978). Othering is a concept that plays an important role in several relevant theories like feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, Poststructuralism and ecocriticism. The colonial project for political and economical gains that started during the Age of Renaissance was also the beginning of exploitation of the ecology by man endlessly and selfishly which has intensified over the years. This tendency of man further distanced him from the natural world. The relationship of humans and the nature is very similar to that of the orient and occident where nature and orient are regarded as dark, marginalised, unknown, uncontrollable, wild, ignorant, inferior, silent, exotic other and the relative whereas man and occident was regarded as light, known, controlled, mainstream, civilised, developed, sophisticated, knowledgeable, superior, language and the absolute self. Further, the postcolonial concept of Eurocentric can be seen in the attitude of anthropocentricism. The centrality of humans will always be present even in dealing with the world beyond humans, either from a positive or a negative point but his presence is destined. Like the postcolonial idea of ambivalence, culture needs the presence of nature to acknowledge itself as superior while at the same time, resisting the presence of nature which culture regards to be inferior, unwanted, uncontrollable, unpredictable and marginal which has been fixed and frequently repeated in literary as well as critical

writings. This stereotyping of nature and culture is the result of the play of social ideologies, language, education and the politics of representation.

The most important concept of ecocriticism has been the study of dualism of nature and culture wherein nature was wild, uncontrollable, unpredictable, unknown, silent and the exotic other while culture was sophistication, developments, predictable, known, controlled, speaking and the absolute occident, under the "common logic of domination" which is reflective of the binary between man and women, wherein women was seen as unpredictable, uncontrollable, ignorant, indecisive, unknown, marginal, exotic other, inferior, and silent, while man was seen as knowledge, decisive, predictable, controlled, decisive, absolute and superior. Both nature and women are social constructs that have been marginalised and made voiceless by social forces.

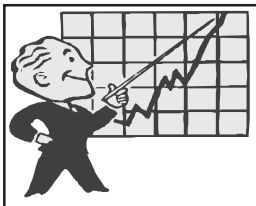
Ecofeminism is an important part of ecocriticism that primarily studies this sensitive issue of nature and woman as opposed to man and culture which has been emphasised in the works of several famous ecocritics like Isabella Bird, Mary Austin, Rachel Carson and Anne Dillard that have been aptly capture in the Vera L. Norwood's essay "Heroines of Nature". This essay is a study that attempts to draw a parallelism to understand the (mis)representation of both nature and women through the images constructed by society and language. Ecofeminism is a blended study of ecological and gender issues that attempts to provide a platform to witness the similar struggles, experiences, oppression, exploitation, abuses and representation politics that has made both nature and women a subaltern who apparently has no voice and therefore 'needs to be represented'. It attempts to break the binary of woman and nature in opposition to man and culture. Ecofeminism wants to make the readers conscious of the importance of the unlearning the established order of knowledge and power. Most ecofeminists supports the ideals of Woolf's 'androgyny' that was formulated in her significant work, *A Room of One's Own (*1929*)* that will help individuals to explore their own true self and all their potentials. Androgyny is the blend of feminine and masculine attributes in a single individual that will better equip individuals to face the dilemma and complex realities of the modern world.

Another important branch of Ecocriticism is Eco Marxism and Social Ecology. The main consideration of this branch of study is that there is a hierarchical play of power and dominance in the natural world. According to the Great Chain of Being, which places man, above all the other natural beings is reflective to the class system of society which explains the exploitation of the lower class by the upper class. Likewise, in a similar manner, the endless exploitation of the natural world by the humans has been explained. Further, we see in the capitalistic world, everything is seen as a commodity with its own value and utility. This has lead to limiting the perspective of the natural world to a space of raw materials and resources. Nature has been commodified and branded in the conscious modern world that purchases 'organic and healthy' food items for which a high price is demanded. However, this is an advertising approach to sell commodities for monetary profit. Another concept that should be taken into consideration by this branch is ecotourism. It is a type of tourism, wherein business and ecology are blended together for the purpose of conservation, recreation, escape, pleasure, aesthetics capitalistic and monetary benefits. It takes man closer to nature but only on a superficial level. It doesn't consider in developing a deep intimate bond of man with nature.

Ethics is a philosophical study of morality and virtues, which are believed to be essential for the holistic growth of an individual and harmony in society. Ethics plays an integral part of ecocriticism. Ethics has always emphasised on the attempts to dissolve the human ego so as to enter the private worlds of different entities in the landscape which will enables readers to understand and appreciate the magnificence and diversity of the natural world.

In the ecologically conscious age, attempts have been made to maintain and improve the quality of the ecology but without any efforts for radical social changes that can hamper the comfort and luxury of humans. This highlights the shallow intentions of a capitalistic society founded on a system of ethics that is always shifting its boundaries to redefine itself so as to suit the purposes of a generation. This category of individuals are labelled as Environmentalism who uphold the ideals of science, technology,

human rights, liberal democracy and economic progress even at the cost of environmental crisis. As against this category, we have the Deep Ecologists who whose poet laureate was Greg Snyder and its philosophical guru was Arne Naess who has set out eight pointers of deep ecology in George Session's anthology, *Deep Ecology for the Twenty First Century* (1995) The shallow approaches for the preservation of nature by the environmentalist was limited only for the sake of man while deep ecology includes the intrinsic value of nature. Deep Ecology makes the shift of tendency from human centric to a nature centric system of values. According to Michael J. Mcdowell, in his essay, "The Bakhtinan Road to Ecological Insight", "every literary attempt to listen to voices in the landscape or to "read the book of nature" is necessarily anthropocentric. It's our language, after all, that we are using and we inevitably put our values into the representation" with our varying degrees of egoism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q 8: What are the main tenants of Ecofeminism?

Q 9: 'Ecocriticism is closely associated to ethics'. Compare the critical approaches of Environmentalism and Deep Ecology**.**

Q 10 : What is Eco Marxism?



14.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Ecocriticism has been a fast expanding discipline that has been raising sensitive ecological concerns in parallel to other major theoretical approaches that has furthered the scope of intensive study for ecocriticism. It is not only an area of study of humans and the ecology but also includes the non-human world that has opened the way for anti-anthropocentric studies. Ecocriticism highlights the ecological concerns as a global issue and not limited to a local and situational context, thereby politely urging people to join forces to uproot the

environmental crisis. It calls for a stronger commitment, unification and preservation of the ecology. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary approach that attempts not only to study ecology but the world beyond ecology including the study of cyborgs, new materialism and object oriented studies. Ecocriticism is therefore, not limited to a theoretical study but is a greater social responsibility that everyone should make their contribution for, so as to expand the boundaries of this discipline as the concerns of this discipline is urgent, global and ethical. Ecocriticism is a new journey which seeks to chart out a more defined and unique approach that is more in tune with the ecology and which will to a more truer and real representation of the natural world. It is an all-encompassing study of reality, life and living. It is moralising yet intellectual, emotional yet critical, and ethical yet scientific.



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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Trace the word 'ecology' as a concept of the natural sciences and how and why it was introduced to literature (and by whom) and to the eventual coining of the term Ecocriticism (and by whom).

Ans to Q 2: Trace the events through the 1960s till the 1990s and the role played by the Western Literature Association in 1992 leading to the birth of ASLE and its journal ISLE.

Ans to Q 3: The main objectives of ecocriticism has been an attempt to understand the construct of 'ecology' as a cultural discourse despite being a physical existence which has been outcome of politics of narratives, language, representation and ideologies.

Ans to Q 4: The concerns of ecocriticism are not local and personal but global and planetary and thereafter the only battle worth fighting for as without the ecology, man will perish.

Ans to Q 5: Trace the spiritual conception associated with nature making it a nature centric world driven by the dominant ideologies of animism and paganism that ruled the social structure of this period.

Ans to Q 6: How it turned man away from nature. Also talk about natural theology and how it reduced the ecology as only a link to the creator. As a consequence, nature lost its own original essence and identity.

Ans to Q 7: The Western Literature Association of 1992 contributed to ecocriticism through the efforts of ASLE and ISLE that played a significant role in the foundation of ecocriticism as a theoretical approach.

Ans to Q 8: Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism as well as proposed several fundamental definitions for the understanding of the theory which aims at studying the relationship between ecology and literature.

Ans to Q 9: Most eco critics are sensitive to the ecological crisis and therefore aim to make the readers ecologically conscious beings in the hope for productive and progressive changes for a better eco future.

Ans to Q 10: Ecofeminsim is a concept of ecocriticism that blend the concerns of gender, nature and culture to understand the (mis)representations constructed by society and language.

Ans to Q 11: The aim of ecocriticism is to make their readers social responsible and ecologically conscious. Ethics and ecocriticism go hand in hand but the frame of ethics has been constantly changing leading to the sub school of thoughts like environmentalism and deep ecology (emphasis on the main objectives and functioning ideologies of both the school of thoughts).

Ans to Q 11: It attempts to study the idea of power and division between the human and natural world and the endless exploitation done by humans for economical gains as well as humans attempt to reduce the natural world in relation to commodity and monetary gains.



14.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Ecocrititcism is an interdisciplinary approach which has also recently taken the shape of a social movement. Discuss.

Q 2: Discuss how 'Nature' is treated in Ecocriticism**.**

Q 3: Discuss the politics of language and representation in Ecocriticism.

Q 4: Ecology and ethics play a dominant role in Ecocriticism. Elaborate.

Q 5: What are the future prospects of Ecocriticism? Explain.

Q 6: Discuss how nature was treated during the Romantic Period.

Q 7: Name of few major thinkers associated to Ecocriticism and their contribution to the foundation and growth of the critical discipline.

Q 8: The contemporary society has adopted an 'in-indoor' lifestyle with minimal contact with Nature. Justify your views.

Q 9: 'Ecocriticism is not only a theoretical concept but also a social responsibility with global and planetary concerns.' Comment.

Q 10: What are the main objectives of Ecocriticism? Discuss.

Q 11: Why is Ecocriticism important as an area of study and research in contemporary times?

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UNIT 15: POST THEORY

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Introducing the Concept of Post Theory

15.4 Let us Sum up

15.5 Further Reading

15.6 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the concept of post theory
- explain the various contours of Post Theory and why did it emerge
- explore the different implications of Post Theory in contemporary literary studies

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the course Literary and Critical Theory I. In this unit, we shall discuss the concept of post theory and the way it has been used as part of an intellectual and academic movement. The concept of Post theory emerged as a number of scholars across the globe began to wonder whether the intellectual movement often know under the term, 'Theory' might have finally run out of fuel. Although theory has a white, patriarchal and western cultural origin, following 1980s, a perennial concern among the contemporary Theorists displayed in a number of publications has begun to pose this issue in a different way. In its more contemporary manifestation, post theory offers seemingly perennial doubts about the status and scope of the realm of the 'the Theoretical'. For this unit, in order to discuss the various offshoots of the concept of Post Theory, we shall adapt from the chapter "Conclusion: Post-theory" in Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker edited book *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*

15.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF POST THEORY [Adapted from Raman Seldon et al]

While theory–sustained by its attendant Introductions, Guides, Readers and Glossaries–has since taken deep and pervasive root in Departments of English across the world and related areas of study, the anxieties it has engendered have persisted. David Carroll and Jonathan Culler, for example, rehearsed such complaints during the 1990s as follows: if the status of the literary canon is in doubt; if the formal integrity of literature, of art and of textual evidence in general is ousted by ideas of inner contradiction, marginality and indeterminacy; if objective fact is replaced by an idea of narrative construction; if the normative unity of the reading subject is questioned – then 'it must be the fault of "theory", which seems anyway not to be about literature at all…

Other studies, however, appearing on the cusp of and into the new millennium, have taken on a new tone. For it seems now that the days of theory, which gave rise to these anxieties, are over. As a flurry of titles have told us, the present age has opened upon the 'End of Theory' or, more ambiguously, the moment of 'after-' or 'post-' Theory. Thus, we are presented with Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2002), Jean-Michel Rabaté's *The Future of Theory* (2002) and Terry Eagleton's *After Theory* (2003), as well as the collections, *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism* (1999), *What's Left of Theory*? (2000) and *Life After Theory* (2003). Leaving aside any argument about whether we can ever meaningfully be 'post-theory', in the end we discover that what this portends is less a dramatic apocalypse than a reorientation. For what, by common consent, is thought to be over is the age of 'Theory', with its commanding capital letter and associated star names–especially that cast of (mostly) French intellectuals associated with varieties of Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Postmodernism: Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Kristeva, Cixous, Spivak, Bhabha and Jameson, who dominated thinking in the 1970s and 1980s.

Now there seems to be no single orthodoxy; no new movement one must catch up with; no difficult, philosophically inclined, theory text one

must read. Some newer figures might be nominated for the role of leading theorist–Slavoj Z¡iz¡ek or Judith Butler, for example–but Butler herself, at least, would reject such a role: 'I do not understand the notion of "theory", she says, 'and am hardly interested in being cast as its defender, much less in being signified as part of an elite gay / lesbian theory crowd' (Rabaté, 2002: 1). From one perspective, this is a situation to be regretted. Where, in British or Western culture…is the public intellectual of the stature of Raymond Williams or Edward Said who will give a lead on major political issues? But then, this concern too is a long-standing one, centred over the last two centuries – curiously enough, surely – upon the special place of literature and a literary education in the general culture.

The recourse to 'Theory' in the heyday of the 1980s (which appeared to mean not *literary* theory, but 'philosophy', 'psychoanalysis', 'feminism' or 'cultural theory') seemed to some to facilitate this broader role. To others, though, this was the heart of the problem. For the injunction to consult the theoretical canon or 'latest thing', could be felt as an intimidating, modish or frustrating distraction from the proper business of literary study. The difference now, once more, is that these questions–including questions on the specific nature and role of literature or art–are being asked, not in the spirit of 'anti-theory', but of 'post-Theory' with its capital letter. For invariably the works on this theme tell us there can be no return to the days of pre-theory in lower case. Rather, it is felt that the high 'Theory' of the 1970s and 1980s is now superseded or thoroughly absorbed into theory or 'theories', understood less as a body of texts or positions than an activity: one which brings a critical scepticism to taken for granted assumptions about institutions, social, sexual, economic relations, and conceptions of subjective, cultural and transcultural identities.

Thus theory is 'a pugnacious critique of common sense notions', says Jonathan Culler (1997), which 'offers not a set of solutions but the prospect of further thought'; David Carroll (1990) concurs: theory confronts 'the unexamined aspects of the dominant critical strategies and analytical methods…the contradictions and complexities inherent in traditional questions'; it seeks 'to ask different kinds of questions or to ask questions

in a different way'; is committed to 'keeping the critical process open'. For Michael Payne (2003), 'theory is about how we self-reflectively see things'; for Terry Eagleton (2003), similarly: 'If theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever.' And Valentine Cunningham (2002) – dispensing with the consolations of innocent reading – confirms that 'We all – all of us readers – come after theory'. In this sense theory is here to stay; it is, as Culler says, 'endless'.

…For Culler, in an essay in the volume *What's Left of Theory?* (2000), it is explicitly literature and the literary which have been neglected. In particular, what has been sidelined is the self-reflexiveness of the literary text, the 'poetic function' famously described by the linguist Roman Jackobson as 'the focus on the message for its own sake'. This distinctive mark of the literary has been overlaid by the imperatives of race, sexuality, gender. And where this occurs, Culler says in his 1997 book, literary studies and its modes of textual analysis defer to the 'symptomatic interpretation' of a sociologically inclined cultural studies. …The volume in which Culler's essay of 2000 appears contains two essays directly on issues of race, sexuality identity politics and the law which make no mention of literature. This does not mean they are not valuable essays, but it does help make Culler's point that 'the question of literature', once 'at the heart of the theoretical project' (most evidently in structuralism), no longer occupies this place. Despite this, Culler means to keep 'the literary in theory', because from this position, the complexities and indeterminacies which comprise the 'thick description' of literary texts can complicate or challenge standard assumptions or reductive propositions on questions, for example, of identity, agency or kinship which also interest cultural studies. The difficulty, however, would seem to be in maintaining this textual emphasis. If theory, as above, is understood as an attitude of permanent critique, open to alterity and the other, then it is close cousin to the literary, and the signs, Culler says, are indeed that 'the literary has migrated into theory'. For some, on the contrary, the literary has spread even further – in fact, too far – to become the common idiom of a self-consciously fictionalizing postmodern culture. The price of this extension, for Culler, is the loss of distinctiveness and critical edge:

'perhaps it is time', he reasons therefore, 'to reground the literary in literature'. What beckons, then, is a return to 'poetics', the concerted study of the operation and reception of poetry and narrative developed in Culler's own earlier work.

Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2002) would also return us to literature. The 'Theory' first introduced in the 1960s has had an undoubted impact, he says, upon the teaching of English and other disciplines. But where do we go from here? Should we embark on a re-reading of the canon? Should we pick and mix, text by text, much as we select items from the supermarket shelves or from the 'gumbo' (the full and varied plate) of an exotic postmodernism? Cunningham's answer calls for a return to the traditional close reading of texts, which he believes theory has 'cast into outer . . . darkness'. We might wonder in passing to what extent this has been true of feminist or postcolonial criticism; and isn't deconstruction committed to a close engagement with texts? Terry Eagleton (2003), for one, states clearly that 'It is not true that cultural theory avoids close reading'. Cunningham remains unconvinced, while allowing that a number of critics and some theorists have kept to the path of close reading and that others have returned from the outer darkness of Theory, having seen the error of their ways. His exemplary case is Frank Kermode who holds firm to what Cunningham calls 'the old, and British, tradition of interest in truth and value and reference'. These virtues he contrasts with a postmodern scepticism towards truth, avoidance of value, and substitution of difference for reference. The ideal relation of a reader with a text depends in all this, says Cunningham, on 'tact': the 'gentle' 'caring', 'loving touch' of an 'unmanipulative reading' in 'close-up, hands-on-textual encounters', and showing 'a rational, proper, moral even, respect for the primacy of text over all theorizing about text'.

All reading and all readers come 'after theory'. So Cunningham reiterates, and so much is generally agreed. But when we go back to read the text, what theory do we take with us? The practice of close reading has had its own associated schools and exemplars from early in the 1920s and its own implied theoretical suppositions about literary form, meaning and

value. However, Cunningham is not advocating a return to the supposed objectivity of Practical or New Criticism, though he shares the major assumption with these movements that the text has primacy – for if theory comes first, it should know its place, he says, as the 'lesser partner' and handmaiden to criticism. Beyond this, Cunningham's guiding terms and criteria – truth, reference, 'good sense', 'humanism and moralism'–evoke an older tradition whose core principles, he contends, were ignored or displaced by Theory.

His response to the sceptical and pluralist ethos marking the aftermath of Theory raises a number of important and contentious issues. Of these, one of the most important – most obviously in debates on the literary canon – is the question of 'literary value'. Frank Kermode, in fact, provides an interesting example here. Though he was one of the first to introduce and encourage discussion of the new theory in the late 1960s and 1970s, Kermode has remained more a literary critic than a theorist. While alert to theory's insights and supportive of the need, as he puts it in a recent discussion (2003), 'to think about what thinking about literature means', he is aware that this activity could not satisfy the desire 'to come into intimate contact with literary texts'. 'Since the aesthetic is out of fashion', he says, we have a self-reflexive theoretical discourse and some shaky classical and romantic ideas concerning literary value, coherence, wholeness and 'organic unity'. We remain confused, therefore, about what makes art or literature good for us. Cunningham has no such doubts, at least about how to approach literature: it comes down to 'what all tactful readers have known all along, namely that all good and true reading is close reading; that no reading can claim the name which is not like that'.

One value Kermode does allude to strongly is that of 'general civility', something he finds in intellectual discussion, in Shakespeare, and in a style of criticism which seeks to address academic and general readers alike. Perhaps Cunningham, too, has such a double readership in mind, both as readers of literature and of his own study – hence its loosely conversational, openly combative tone. The result connects, or seeks to connect, good literature, good reading and an idea of good society: a humanist scenario

whose sources (in an 'old, and British, tradition') lie as deep in 'pre-Theory' as in the moment of 'after Theory'. Cunningham's call for a return to a traditional 'tactful' reading of literary texts finds at once a companion and contestant in another, reinvigorated older practice. Close reading, claims Jonathan Bate (2003), looked down on an interest in the 'facts' of an author's life or the scholarly editing of texts. 'We weren't very scientific in those days', he says – until 'Theory', that is, which as Structuralism (he mentions Culler admiringly) appeared to offer a 'new rigour and objectivity'. This was disturbed by Deconstruction, which seemed to endorse saying 'whatever we liked' as long as it now illustrated a text's self-deconstruction rather than its unity. 'Facts' were again ruled out of court. Even so, through this period and the turn to ideology, thinks Bate, 'literary scholarship – biographical, historical, bibliographic and textual' continued quietly on while theory made all the running and all the noise. Now, he proposes, critics, teachers and students need the 'basics' first, not of theoretical '-isms', but of literary biography and textual bibliography.

Textual bibliography examines the transition of a text from manuscript to book, in this way seeking the factual textual evidence of an author's intentions, forms of censorship, collaboration and revision. Often this procedure, which emerged strongly in the 1980s, is called 'genetic criticism'. The versions and revisions comprising the genesis of James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, for example, have received this kind of diligent treatment. 'Genetic Criticism', as Jean-Michel Rabaté (2002) suggests, is the key remaining example of literary study's relation to science. It has some affinities, too, with historical method – though much depends then on what we mean by 'history'. For although, on the one hand, 'genetic criticism' owes something to New Historicism or Cultural Materialism and to Deconstruction (displacing a reverential notion of the 'original' with the material evidence of textual difference), it can also sound like a reassertion of undisputed 'fact' anchored in the physical evidence of the textual archive. Bate encourages the latter view: fact has been branded, he recalls – evoking Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* and the character of its disciplinarian school-teacher, Thomas Gradgrind – as the sign of an oppressive

industrialism. But in our own postmodern age of image and simulation, the coin is flipped over, says Bate, with the result that the subject of English now needs the Gradgrindery of sheer fact to critique the 'free for all' the discipline and society have become. The implication, too, is that with so much patient, textual deciphering to do, theoretical questions can be left on the shelf. We might be forgiven for thinking that, for some of these authors, 'after Theory' in effect means a return either to the formalist or traditional reading of literary texts or to a reinvigorated literary scholarship which is in fact bored with or indifferent to Theory. John Brenkman (2000) implies that any invocation of the 'literary' will be nostalgic – and there is a degree of nostalgia surely in Culler's, Cunningham's and Bate's arguments. Brenkman adds usefully, however, that there can be 'formalist and nonformalist approaches to form'. But if he himself sides with the latter, it is with some aversion to the routine non-formalist analysis of the themes of race, class, gender and sexuality associated with a reductive version of cultural studies. Current criticism of this type ignores the dynamic of inner form, he says, and so weakens the connection of literature and politics where it should be strongest. Brenkman therefore calls for attention to be paid to inner form *and* to worldliness (the 'historical life world' comprising the content of an artwork). Both the social practice of writing and aesthetic experience, he adds, belong to the public realm – the second in the sense that an experience of beauty depends upon the assent of others to that beauty. This public realm Brenkman sees as sustained by the liberal and republican traditions of Western thought, which – damaged though they are – 'cannot be superseded'. Broad consequences would thus follow from a new emphasis upon form: a revitalized linkage of literature and politics and a reaffirmation of the public realm and Western Enlightenment traditions upon which, for Brenkman, such a linkage depends.

We see how, advancing on the distinction made earlier by Rabaté between theory on one side and the 'something' which is missing on the other, that it matters what is meant not only by 'theory' but by these second terms ('the literary', 'reading', 'culture', 'politics') and how then the relations between these terms are understood. Some new criticism has also

introduced other more specific domains, themes and issues having to do with the law, ecology, space and location (Garrard, 2004; Brooker, 2002). This work is also often linked with new interdisciplinary initiatives, between literary and legal studies or literature and social and cultural geography, for example, whose agenda is neither narrowly textual nor overwhelmingly theoretical, but is committed none the less to the subtleties of inner form and to present-day social and political issues. Much Feminist and Postcolonial criticism has also maintained what Brenkman describes as 'non-formalist approaches to form'. At this point, however, we want to look at two approaches – perhaps manifestos would be a better term – which urge us to look afresh to either end of this spectrum of form and worldliness, or, to put it differently again: art and politics.

One self-proclaimed new direction has been the 'New Aestheticism', announced under this title in the collection of essays by Joughlin and Malpas (2003). 'The rise of critical theory', the editors say on their first page, 'has all but swept aesthetics off the map.' What in this case has been lost, they claim, is 'the sense of art's specificity as an object of analysis . . . its specificity as an aesthetic phenomenon'. An initial problem with this proposal is that ideas of 'the aesthetic' and 'aestheticism' suggest a rearguard action rather than a new beginning: a return to a belief in artistic autonomy, individual genius, and transcendent universal values, or to the provocative formalism of the 'art for art's sake' movement of the late nineteenth century. Harold Bloom, too, it is worth noting, founds his Western Canon (1995) on aesthetic criteria rather than on moral values or cultural politics – for which he has only disdain. And Bloom also laments 'the flight from the aesthetic among so many of my profession'. However, there is a significant difference in intention between these authors. For Bloom, the aesthetic is 'an individual rather than a social concern' and a measure of art's autonomy – of which he tends to feel himself the lone defender. The editors, contributors and associated authors of the 'New Aestheticism' argue, in a quite different direction, that theirs is a social, indeed political, concern: that a 'turn' to the aesthetic implies a radical reorientation, vital, in Isobel Armstrong's account (2000), to a democratic founding of literary education.

The case made by Joughlin and Malpas is first that the 'New Aestheticism' inaugurates a conversation with philosophy which theory avoided. What theory in fact tended to pillory and reject, they argue, was an outmoded view of the aesthetic. This attitude assumed that the aesthetic stood for the idea of artistic autonomy and a universalizing humanist ideology, falsely derived, says Isobel Armstrong, from Immanuel Kant. Instead, the proponents of 'New Aestheticism' are advocating a new 'post-theoretical' phase, even a 'post-aestheticism', when theory becomes more reflective, but in ways which will have wide implications for art and culture. Above all this entails maintaining a dialectical view of works of art which recognizes that while 'Art is inexplicably tied to the politics of contemporary culture . . . the singularity of the work's "art-ness" ' is not determined by surrounding political, historical or ideological discourses. As such, the 'new' or 'post-aesthetic' is strongly indebted to Theodor Adorno's ' "defence of autonomous art as socially critical" ' and his belief that ' "art works bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world" '.

…Both textual bibliography or 'Genetic Criticism' and the 'New Aestheticism' present themselves as responses to the contemporary world, which is seen as standing in need either of more facts or of more play and transgressive openness. They show, once more, how diverse the positions taken up 'after theory' can be, but also how these differences depend on the way in which the wider world is perceived. That both Bate and Docherty use an example from literary fiction is itself interesting; that they use the same example to quite different ends is also clearly revealing. We might ask, however, how relevant the symbolic figure and philosophy of Dickens's Thomas Gradgrind is. Is the present age a utilitarian age? Don't we hear more about 'spin' than 'facts', and hasn't market capitalism and globalization taken us a long way from the English industrial revolution?

In this connection, the editors of *The New Aestheticism* refer at one point to the significantly titled volume, *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983). The introduction to this collection by Hal Foster, and the key essays it contained by Jürgen Habermas, Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, helped launch a decade of debate on postmodernism. For Joughlin and Malpas, this

introduction of the postmodern spelt the simultaneous and premature rejection of the aesthetic. In the passage they quote, Foster himself recognizes the force of Adorno's conception of the aesthetic as a negative, subversive category: 'a critical interstice in an otherwise instrumental world'. This, he says, 'is hard to relinquish'. Foster's point, however, is that, 'Now [in postmodern times] we have to consider that this aesthetic space too is eclipsed'. It follows that 'New Aestheticism', in so far as it is '*new*', must show how its arguments connect with the details of this changed world–or how literature can be reconnected to society and politics, to echo Brenkman's theme. To put this differently, the evident debt to Adorno in these arguments suggests how much the resources for a 'new aesthetic' lie in the modernist tradition and an associated aesthetic of 'estrangement'– that is, of art's own 'alienation', critical distance and potential. In hailing the 'new' and 'modern', Docherty refers, for example, to 'the defamilarising contact with the unknown'. Elsewhere, Joughlin reflects on the process of 'adaptation' as evidence of the potential and openness to otherness of exemplary art-works. To what purpose, we might ask, does this New Aestheticism 'adapt' an earlier modernist, *avant-garde* impulse to a world where art is enmeshed in contemporary commodity culture? Does a 'new aesthetic' of play and transgressive internal critique stand as a credible opponent to what in many accounts of the postmodern is described as an already thoroughly aestheticized world of simulation and the 'free play' of signs – or what Joughlin and Malpas call 'the rootless aesthetic contingencies of cultural studies or lit. crit. postmodernism'?

In his volume *After Theory* (2003), Terry Eagleton means to respond at the outset to the present world situation. For him, the 'other half' missing from theory is not literature or reading, culture or aesthetics, but politics. The theory Eagleton has in mind, however, is not so much the 'high theory' of Foucault, Derrida, Cixous and others, but 'postmodernism', which he generally also identifies with recent cultural theory. The problem confronting the present age, Eagleton argues, is fundamentalism: the West's 'implacable political enemy'. In the face of this challenge, a 'postmodern' theoretical and critical agenda focusing on gender, race and sexuality, along with its characteristic attitudes of scepticism and pluralism, is found

seriously wanting. The latter's wariness of concepts of absolute truth and the universal – of fundamentals, in short – means that it lacks depth and ambition: 'where the political right acts globally', as Eagleton puts it, 'the postmodern left thinks locally', confined to the pragmatic and particular while the 'grand narrative' of capitalist globalization sweeps up everything in its path, including postmodern cultural theory itself, which emerges less as critique than accomplice of late capitalism, attached as it is – and as is capitalism – to the transgressive, hybrid and pluralistic. In the realm of value, Eagleton comments, a deconstruction of fixed hierarchies has 'merged effortlessly with the revolutionary levelling of all values known as the marketplace'.

Eagleton's alternative is an ambitious 'political criticism' (to borrow a description from his earlier *Literary Theory: An Introduction*) within a revitalized Marxist and socialist tradition. 'After theory' therefore means *more* theory, on a grander and more responsible scale, open to the large questions postmodernism has shied away from: of morality and metaphysics, love, biology, religion and revolution, evil, death and suffering, essences, universals, truth, objectivity and disinterestedness. This new project embraces, that is to say, both an expanded Marxism and a revaluation of some of the keystones of liberalism. Thus the concept of 'disinterestedness' Eagleton wants to understand not as 'impassivity' but as the opposite of 'self-interest'; similarly, 'objectivity' he interprets not as a spurious impartiality but as ensuring a recognition of the independent existence of 'the other'. It includes, too, a willingness to reflect on the legitimacy of Western values in the face of the fundamentalisms which reject this model…



15.4 LET US SUM UP

From our reading of the excerpt on Post Theory, we have learnt how Post Theory has enabled the intellectuals to ponder upon the utility of theory in interpreting literature. As Valentine Cunningham in *Reading After Theory* (2002) stated, the theory first introduced in the 1960s has had an undoubted impact upon the teaching of English and other disciplines.

However, other thinkers like David Carroll and Jonathan Culler expressed their views that if the status of the literary canon is in doubt; if the formal integrity of literature is ousted by ideas of inner contradiction, marginality and indeterminacy; if objective fact is replaced by an idea of narrative construction; if the normative unity of the reading subject is questioned – then 'it must be the fault of "theory". However, due to Post Theory, we are also in a privileged situation. As opined by Terry Eagleton, 'After theory' means *more* theory, on a grander and more responsible scale, open to the large questions postmodernism has shied away from: of morality and metaphysics, love, biology, religion and revolution, evil, death and suffering, essences, universals, truth, objectivity and disinterestedness. This new project, according to Eagleton embraces both an expanded Marxism and a revaluation of some of the keystones of liberalism. This has undoubtedly rendered a more enriched engagement with literary studies.



15.5 FURTHER READING

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15.6 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the basic premises of the concept of Post Theory? Discuss with reference to some of the thinkers who contributed to the concept.

Q 2: Name some of the important critical works which popularised the term Post Theory or After Theory and discuss their influence on theoretical discussions.

Q 3: Do you think that 'Post Theory' also liberates the interpretations of texts from the shackles of the rigidity in theory? Elaborate.

Q 4: Why did 'Post Theory' emerge? Discuss with reference to the important arguments provided by critics like David Carroll, Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton.

*** ***** ***



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Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006
(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?
