

## Literary Theory

### Unit I

#### Introduction

- I. Why literary theory?
  - body of ideas and methods used in practical reading of literature
  - describes underlying principles
  - tools by which to understand literature
  - formulates relation between author and work
  - develops the significance of race, class, gender
  - helps understand historical contexts
  - helps understand the linguistic elements of the text
  - explicates how the text is a product of culture than an individual author.
- II Nature of literary theory:
  - Constantly changing and overlapping
  - An interdisciplinary body because it draws ideas from disciplines like linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis and philosophy
- III Literary criticism and literary theory:
  - Criticism focuses on defining, classifying, expounding and evaluating
- IV What is literature?
  - Literature is not studied for information
  - not verifiable, not paraphrasable
  - language can be vague, emotional
  - great literature is universal and timeless, has to be interpreted.
- V Changing worlds and changing words:
  - The three waves
  - The First wave: Agrarian Revolution:
    - village and family centred life, skills handed down through generations, Feudalistic, local experience and perceptions
  - The Second wave: Industrial Revolution:
    - urbanization, consumerism and capitalism. Urban, migrative, repetitive,
    - Mechanical, workplace came into existence, man-machine equation, perceptions wider, Eurocentric concepts become universal concepts
  - The Third Wave: Information Revolution:
    - Repetitive tasks done by computers, robots
    - home becomes office
    - knowledge explosion
    - equal opportunities for men and women
    - globalization as a solution for all problems

- Residues of waves remain
- Our thinking Agrarian? Industrial? Information?
- Classical—Modern—Postmodern
- Watertight compartments not possible
- Change is permanent—Anything that does not change is dead
- World changes us; word changes us
- We change the world ; we change the word
- notions of life changes; notions of literature changes

#### VI Growth of English Studies:

- 19<sup>th</sup> century: only two universities: more like monasteries
- Greek and Latin literature, divinity and maths
- Slow changes
- Fearing revolution education was made available to all
- Should literature be studied along with language?
- English introduced in Indian universities

#### VII The Critical Tradition:

1. Plato: The Republic : Poetry an imitation of an imitation  
Criticism-moral end-leading to good—Iliad and Odyssey
2. Aristotle:Poetics: Prescriptive-art of communication, catharsis
3. Horace: Ars Poetica: prescriptive
4. Longinus: “ On the Sublime”

#### VIII 1. Philip Sidney: Apology for Poetry(1580)—Poetry teaches and delights

Philosophy—worthy and uplifting  
Subordinates poetry to philosophy

2. Dr. Johnson: Lives of Poets, Preface to Shakespeare—start of practical criticism
3. Wordsworth: Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800) edition preface added—language of poetry can be ordinary
4. Coleridge: Biographia Literaria—language of poetry should be different if it has to entertain
5. Shelley: Defence of Poetry(1821)—poetry removes familiarity
6. Matthew Arnold: The Study of Poetry—literature can substitute the lack of faith in religion—the Touchstone method
- 7, F. R. Leavis: The crucial test for a text is whether it is conducive to life and vitality
8. T.S. Eliot: Tradition and Individual Talent  
Dissociation of sensibility—separate thought from feeling  
Poetic impersonality—poetry is not pouring out of personal emotions but transcending them

Objective Correlative—emotion can be best expressed through action, gesture and symbolism

#### IX. Approaches to Literature:

##### 1. Author Oriented:

- focus on writer's mind
- author's intentions not neglected
- biographical details

##### 2. Reader Oriented:

- productive role for reader
- reader becomes an author
- different readers are differently affected by reality of text
- reading becomes a creative activity

##### 3. Context oriented:

- i. Psycho-analytic criticism: uses psychoanalysis for interpreting texts
- ii Feminist criticism: gender discrimination and patriarchal mindset becomes base for studying texts
- iii New Historicism: Parallel reading of literary texts of the same historical period
- iv. Postcolonial Criticism: Finding a voice and identity for the suppressed people
- v. Marxist Criticism: Socio-economic context is important for analysing a text.
- vi. Archetypal Criticism: Repetition of archetypes in literature

##### 4. Text- Oriented Theories:

- i. Formalism: Prague Circle-scientific base for the theory of literature
- ii. Practical Criticism: I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, Cleanth Brooks, Ransom, Allan Tate, R. P. Warren.
- iii. Structuralism: Ferdinand de Saussure: Swiss linguist—text is analyzed in terms of language
- iv. Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction—multiple opposite meanings existing in the same text

#### Chapter II—Pre-modern, Modern and Postmodern

##### I. Pre-modern: 1. Classicism

- English tradition starts with Greek and Roman models
- ‘Classicus’ –refers to literature of Greece and Rome
- works of authors of highest class

Traits of classical literature: order, beauty, clarity, tranquility, will never be displaced

The ideal Roman figure—Greek sculpture

Thinkers: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

--English classicism is an attempt to revive the ideal qualities in the classical Greco-Roman tradition

--Renaissance—Revival of learning

--The Printing Press made classical study an integral part of the humanities

Pre-modern: 2. Romanticism

1. It was Romanticism that brought an end to Classicism
2. Marked by subtle sense of mystery in things of the past and present
3. Intellectual curiosity, freedom of thought and action
4. Emotional intensity, interest in human beings and the simplicities of life
5. Romanticism broadened the scope of literature by reducing the elements of reverence and authority of classical age
6. The French Romantic spirit marked by liberty, equality and fraternity

Pre-modern: 3. Humanism (Liberal)

1. Literature does not require socio-political, historical and autobiographical backgrounds to comprehend it
2. Close verbal analysis brings out the greatness of the text
3. Good literature brings out the unchanging concepts of human nature
4. Every man retains his individuality—the essence does not change whatever be the circumstances or the environment
5. Purpose of literature is the propagation of human values
6. Form and content are fused in literature: form is not a decoration but a part of the structure
7. There is sincerity in good literature
8. Good literature does not explicitly preach but shows and demonstrates something
9. The job of criticism is to mediate between the text and the reader

II Modernism:

--Began in the first half of twentieth century

--It is the Age of Reason, science and technology

--Age of urbanization and break from tradition

--During early modernism, there was deep nostalgia for the past

--Science and technology replaced faith and religion

--but belief in universal harmony, human essence was retained

--People were loyal to brands

--In music melody and harmony were replaced by jazz

--In painting, direct pictures were replaced by modern art

--In architecture, wood, stone, bricks were replaced by glass and concrete

Traits of Modernist Literature:

1. Rejection of realism—chronological plots, continuous narratives, omniscient narrative and closed endings were rejected

2. Modernism was at its peak in 1930 and again in 1960
3. Famous writers: T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens
4. Impressionism was used to describe impression, sensations and emotions that constitute a character's mental life
5. First person narration and many narrative points of view
6. Blurring of distinction between genres
7. Liking for fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives, random collages of disparate materials
8. Tendency for reflexivity: poems, plays and novels raise issues containing their own nature
9. Use of Stream of Consciousness to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind. Like an interior monologue Eg. Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolfe's *To the Lighthouse*