CHAPTER – VI
CONCLUSION
Throughout this study, an attempt has been made on the irrelevance of critical theories with reference to Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction. Derrida’s deconstructive style of reading subverts the previous assumption that a text has an unchanging and definite meaning. He focuses mainly on language and argues that the traditional reading of a text makes a number of false assumptions. For Derrida, any mode of reading shows the slippery nature of language. Therefore, reading is an activity where the reader himself indulges in the game of language. The reader will interpret meaning with the help of devices like differance (difference and an endless postponement), trace (residual meaning) and supplement (addition or substitution word). What the reader might have not been there in the author’s mind. It is because of the underlying inherent contradiction of language which is the medium of literature. So, we can say that deconstruction is a form of linguistics analysis of the text. In a sense, we cannot arrive at an absolute or fixed meaning for any text.
This chapter is the summarization of the thesis. It presents a brief analysis of Derrida’s deconstruction and its implications on literary works. The first chapter has given a brief biographical sketch of Jacques Derrida. It has highlighted the plan and structure of the whole thesis. It has shown a comprehensive idea about the thesis. The chapter has made up of different structures including a short analysis of what literary theory is, life and important selected works of Derrida and aim of the thesis and the introduction of the topic “Irrelevance of critical theories: A study of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction”. The second chapter has devoted to milieu of critical theories and a brief history of literary theory from the classical period to the twentieth century. The thesis has analysed the social background and the important linguist and philosophers who really helped Derrida in the growth and development of his deconstructive strategy. The social background which is important in shaping Derrida’s career is his sense of belonging to a marginal deprived culture and of Jewish tradition. This idea of marginalization has influenced him on the development of the philosophy of deconstruction. It is because of the influence of great philosophers like Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Husserl, Derrida has become one of the greatest contemporary philosophers.

Another important factor which influenced Derrida to the finding of his deconstructive analysis is his association with the Tel Quel, an influential theoretical journal published between 1960–1983. The journal is popular for publishing varieties of interesting articles by poststructuralist theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes. They deal with the production of new forms of
writing and theory. The journal pays attention to the plurality of language in literature. It is also associated with support for the radical left wing politics of the period. They write against the modern capitalist values, consumption and stable meaning. For better understanding of the literary background of Derrida, a brief analysis of the history of literary criticism has been discussed in this chapter.

The third chapter is ‘Structuralism: the roots of deconstruction’. Derrida has derived the fundamentals of deconstruction from structuralism. It is a significant approach to critical analysis of literary texts in the later half of twentieth century. It stresses on the language and structure of the text in specific genres like novel, drama, poetry etc. According to Alan Bass,

Derrida sees structuralism as a form of philosophical totalitarianism, i.e. as an attempt to account for the totality of a phenomenon by reduction of it a formula that governs it totally.¹

The philosophy of structuralism is based on the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure’s classic work, Course In General Linguistics (1916). His structural linguistics formed the basis of structuralism. According to Saussure, language is a system of signs. Saussure observes a two part model of the sign as signifier and signified. Signifier is the verbal element of a word i.e. the mark we make while writing it or the sound we make while uttering it (e.g. five black marks, H-O-U-S-E-). Signified is the concept evoked in the mind of the reader or the listener (e.g. building for human habitation etc). These two units of sign help in understanding hypothetical and indefinite faces of sign. The sign is
an indefinite object and whatever it is with the sign refers to ‘something’. This ‘something’ is what Saussure terms as referent (the real house). However, the important point made by Saussure is that the relation between a signifier and a signified is entirely arbitrary. There is no inherent reason why the five back marks H-O-U-S-E should mean house. This is because a particular linguistic community started and continued to use this link between the mark and the concept. Thus, the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. In addition to this, the relation between the whole sign and the referent is also arbitrary.

Saussure further declares that the signs have meaning due to its difference from other signs in the system of language. For example, the word ‘rat’ has meaning by virtue of its difference from ‘cat’ or ‘bat’. The signified often changes but this change does not effect in the production of meaning whenever its difference lies from all the signifiers. Saussure’s idea is thus referred to as differential or relational nature of meaning.

Unlike his past linguists, Saussure argues that a word does not refer to the object itself. There is an underlying system in language. In this underlying system one phoneme or structure cannot exist in isolation. The phonemes become a word when it is linked with a concept. A sound image is not the same as the sound. A sound is articulated by means of various organs of speech whereas a sound image is made by human psychology. For instance, the word ‘cat’ unites the concept of ‘cat’ and the sound images of three phonemes. The concepts can never exist and be used till they are
united in sound images. Saussure thus, concludes that language generates differences in meaning.

The structuralists argue that human language and discourses can be studied as structured in terms of binary oppositions. In order to make differences, discourses have always studied as binary oppositions. Through his linguistic theory Saussure introduced *Semiology*, a science that investigates the life of signs within society. It can provide a structural account of the whole human culture.

In the middle of the twentieth century some renowned thinkers began applying Saussure’s linguistic theory to others fields. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes are among those thinkers who specialized in the field of anthropology and culture respectively. Thus, it can be applied in many disciplines such as literature, semiotics, folklore and anthropology.

However, Derrida deconstructs the concepts of structuralism as there are certain issues which are not clear in structuralism. Structuralism advocates the existence of structures and the very structures depend on centers. In this regard, Derrida argues that there is no stable center.

The fourth chapter is ‘Deconstruction’. It is a method of close reading of a literary text which has been initiated by Jacques Derrida. It has originated from Derrida’s study of Saussure’s structuralist poetics. Derrida minutely examines
Saussure’s view on language. Derrida extended Saussure’s notion on language. According to Saussure, signs are meaningful through a chain of oppositions that relate signs to each other. The meaning of a word lies in its difference from other words as well as in its relation to each other. Both spoken and written forms are languages and they are identified by the features of differential and relational nature of words.

Derrida rejected Saussure’s notion of the sign as *signifier* by disassociating it from the *signified*. He puts the *signified* under *erasure* (*Sous rature*) in French, a device used to illustrate the existence of a concept or meaning but requires close study. Derrida indicates the concepts are under *erasure* by drawing a cross mark (X) over them, for example, White, Black Speech, Writing etc. Derrida argues both *signifier* and *signified* are not present in the language. Hence, when one comes to the final conclusion of the significations, yet another *signifier* is discovered.

According to Derrida, each *signifier* is composed of an absent *signifier* based on Saussure’s philosophy that meaning is the end result of differences. Derrida advocates that every word embodies another word. A word has another word within it. All the *signifiers* are made up of that absent *signifier*. In this point, Derrida coined the term *differance* which covered not only the differences between the *signifiers* but the differential concepts of the *signified*. The letter ‘a’ of *differance* is a deliberate misspelling of the word ‘difference’. But it has the same pronunciation with the word difference. Hence, words and meaning are not fully present in language because language is a state of *dissemination* (a state of dispersal or fragmentation of meaning.
where the word itself does not generate complete meanings). Therefore, the quest of
definite meaning is beyond possibility. There is no word or *transcendental signified*
(meaning that lies beyond everything) that is equipped with fixed or stable meaning
itself. No word can stay outside the game of language. In order to stop the play of
meanings, the reader has the tendency to find *transcendental signified*. Derrida further
declares that writing and language is the product of *differance*, difference and
postponement. He states that all forms of writing are difference. Derrida calls the study
of difference as *grammatology* (the science of *arche-writing*).

Derrida has also highlighted the dichotomy existing in speech and writing
linguistically and culturally. Saussure has made a conclusion that speech is superior to
writing because speech is genuine, accurate and reliable. It also concerns only with the
person who is speaking at present. On the other hand, writing refers to something very
artificial and indicates as unsound because writing remains alive after the death of the
writer also. Therefore, speech tends to refer to the presence of the speaker and writing
refers to the absence of the speaker. For this Derrida coins a term called *phonocentrism*
to mean privileging of speech over writing. Speech has the feature of presence where
the audience and the listener get the truth of what the speaker says. However, Derrida
suggests that this truth or reality is built on the idea of a center. Derrida refers to this as
*logocentrism* or the *Metaphysics of presence* (the notion that there is a *transcendental
signified*, a God-Word that underlies all philosophical talk and guaranties its meaning).
He notices that everything is firmly grounded on this *metaphysics of presence*. But there
is no *transcendental signified* because there is no fixed meaning. However, the *signifier* remains in the form of a *trace* (residual meaning).

Each sign is only a *trace* of another and no sign is complete without *supplement* (additional or substitution word). The same notions of *trace, differance* and *supplement* are applicable to texts, too. So, in a text many meanings from various readings intertwined one another. Therefore, the factor of *aporia* (a path that leads no goal) is always there.

Next, Derrida focuses on the nature of the text which required a precise and exact interpretation. Language creates the whole universe in every respect. Language is acquired in a textual form that have established in the phenomena of difference. What we have in the form of a text is indeed, an endless process of a sign system where the *signifiers* are constantly shifting resulting in full of vague, equivocal, absences, *traces* and multiple meaning of other texts. Derrida thus declares: ‘there is nothing outside the text’\(^2\) because any reader will discover this process of shifting *signifiers* within text or in any piece of writing.

So, Derridean deconstruction illustrates the text’s nature of indeterminacy. It tries to explore the ramification of *textuality*. He is always concerned with the ‘between’. With what is between the two things has always been Derrida’s key thought. For this, he used the word ‘hymen’ to refer to a moment of indeterminacy. It is neither inside nor outside. Derrida also uses the word *bricolage* to mean indecisiveness of language.
For Derrida, any mode reading shows the slippery nature of language. Therefore, reading is an activity where the reader himself indulges in the game of language. The reader will interpret meaning with the help of devices like *differance*, *trace* and *supplement*. What the reader might have not been there in the author’s mind.

Deconstruction is against the grand narrative. Every construction or grand narrative has always a center, without that center nothing can be constructed. So, deconstruction tries to deconstruct the construction of grand narratives. It is an activity of close reading where the free plays of binary oppositions are revealed. Thus, Derrida subverts the traditional hierarchical order of things.

Deconstructive notion has revealed the text’s nature of indefinite and uncertain meaning. It has shown that the meaning of a text is really infinite and has a number of conflicting possible meanings. Derrida’s critique of structuralism has resulted in opening up further possibilities of analysis. The deconstructive approach of reading subverts the traditional mode of reading a text. After the arrival of this kind of reading, the critical theories in the past have become absolutely irrelevant. Besides, literary theories such as Marxism, Feminism, Gay and Lesbian and recent studies like New Historicism are also irrelevant after the application of deconstructive analysis.

Marxism an important ideology of the modern age is based on the writings of Karl Marx and Frederich Engels. It is primarily concerned with the issues of class struggle and social exploitation. Marx and Engels noted down certain principles in their
Communist Manifesto. First is the theory of surplus value, which states the fixation of a price or value of any commodity is decided by the value of the work, done by the workers who are utilized in the production of thing. Marx adds to it that all the workers are creating surplus value. That is the wage of a worker is less than the value of a product which he has produced. In doing so, the capitalists gain a large amount after deducting the cost of the raw material and wage of the workers. Thus, the capitalists live a life of comfort, enjoyment and extravagance. On the other hand, the workers lead a miserable life. According to Marx, when the theory of surplus value is not maintained, there will be a class struggle. For Marx, the history of class struggle is as old as the history of mankind. In each age, there have existed two classes—bourgeois and proletariat. The former possesses the means of production, while the later is exploited by the bourgeois. Marx envisages that human life to be a cruel and unpleasant struggle between the two opposite classes. In the same way, under the capitalism or feudalism, the workers or common men struggle and forcibly overthrow the oppressor. Thus, there is always a class struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. This class struggle brings out a change or development in the process of ‘dialectics’. This process will go on forever until socialism is attained. Thus, Marx predicted the birth of socialism, communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

What Marx has presented to us is no longer relevant in deconstructive reading. Marxism is a grand narrative as it tries to impose its ideas on us. In Marxism proletariat is central and bourgeois is marginalized and repressed. Similarly, when bourgeois is central then proletariat will again be marginalized. Such is an attempt to fix the play of
opposites. The marginalized term temporary overthrows the hierarchy. This hierarchy is reversible so, it is unstable and always engaged in the complete free play of binary opposites. Hence-forth the readers meet the factor of irrelevance in Marxism.

Coming to feminism, the feminist critics seek our attention to the marginalization and suppression of women in a male dominated society. There have been so many critics of the movement of feminism. Though their depiction is different, their goal is same. We can study Feminism from the analysis of the well known feminist critic, Elain Showalter’s analysis of the three phases of feminism. They are *faminine phase* (1840–1880), *feminist phase* (1880–1920), *female phase* (1920–till now).

In the first phase, women are trying to get a small space in their works. They are adopting male pseudonyms. They see the subjection of women but it never come in the form of agitation. They have the ability to tolerate what man has done to them. The women revolt against patriarchy in the second phase. They try to show their own identity. They demand of getting equal right. In the final phase, women express whatever they want. Feminist critics like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir writes about the women’s right. They take up their pen with the women issues that reveal their own experiences as women. In continuation of feminist criticism, there is also an area of gender study which is termed as Lesbian/Gay theory. It emerged as a part of Feminist criticism in 1980s which basically focuses on the attitudes of the people towards Lesbian and Gay. It got impetus in 1990s under cultural studies.
They try to eliminate the prejudice against the fear of the same sex friendship through writing.

In feminism when woman is central, then, naturally man is marginalized. In the same way, when man is at the center, woman will again be marginalized. Similarly in a society where heterosexuality is central, homosexuality is marginalized. But this can be reversed in the gay and lesbian theory. Out of the binary opposition one term is central and the other is marginalized. Deconstruction puts this hierarchy into a free play of binary opposites. Therefore, feminism and gay and lesbian theories are not relevant since they are firmly grounded on a stable center.

Besides, structuralism has called our attention to establish the structures that underlie in a text and that structures generate meaning. Derrida argues that structuralism never tries to find meaning rather how the meaning is generated. The structures are not to be taken as permanent. Since there is no permanent structure, there will be no interpretation. Therefore, the factor of *aporía* is always there. When we are trying to interpret a text we must go to the text only. But Structuralism always goes beyond the text. Thus, Structuralism cannot remain longer as an approach of reading a literary text.

Now, we can discuss another important literary theory which comes out after deconstruction. Though there is similarity between deconstruction and new historicism, there are some areas in which new historicism differ from deconstruction. New Historicism advocates the parallel reading of literary and non literary texts of the same period; New Historicists believe that the literary work is the product of time, place and
composition. So, literary text cannot be read and understood in isolation as an independent entity. Though New Historicism suggests a new concept of reading a text, deconstructs itself in a deconstructive analysis. Derrida firmly argues that there is no stable center. When we try to centralize something the other is marginalized. This hierarchy is reversible in deconstructive analysis because there is a free play of binary opposites. The British counterpart Cultural Materialism is also irrelevant in deconstruction. Therefore, in the course of reading one could find the factor of irrelevance.

The above discussions have shown that the critical theories in practice are quite beside the mark in deconstructive analysis. As Derrida seriously questions the idea of a stable center, there can never arrive at the final conclusive meaning. There is always ambiguity when one is aware of the centrality of the central term. The study of deconstruction reveals the indeterminate feature of language. Therefore, any reader can meet the factor of irrelevance in any discourse. When we apply the techniques and methods of deconstruction to any work of literature, the original form is deconstructed. For Derrida, language is an endless process characterized by differance. Alan Bass writes:

Derrida is difficult to read not only by virtue of his style, but also because he seriously wishes to challenge the ideas that govern the way we read. His texts are more easily grasped if we read them in the way he explicitly suggests—which is not always the way we are used to read.³
What Derrida argues is also another aspect of looking a text. Such attitude explores one of the important features of postmodernism. It is a wonderful intellectual exercise. We are living in a developing intellectual world of Information and Communication Technology, so no one get tired in doing intellectual exercise. We have been reading literature traditionally. If we read by using different modes of reading, our outlook will be broadened than before.

Thus, the argument on the thesis is that Derrida’s concept of deconstruction and its effect of the indeterminacy of language have made the irrelevance of critical theories, and thesis has tried to prove with examples. Throughout the thesis, a deep attempt has been made to examine the tactics of deconstruction. After a serious examination of Derrida’s deconstruction and the principles and practices of deconstruction, one can find that nothing is fixed, determinate and relevant. If anyone strictly follows deconstruction, literature would cease to give pleasure in reading. In spite of the complexities in deconstruction when one considers it as an academic intellectual exercise, he/she can have another taste of literature.

Though the study in this area is subjective, it will enhance the knowledge of the students of higher studies in literature. It is hoped that such an attempt to investigate the irrelevance of theories with special reference to Derrida will increase our knowledge of critical studies. It will also acquire the ability to make a distinctive analysis among different modes of study of literature in contemporary literary theory.
However, literary theory gives a turn towards social or cultural criticism. Raymond Williams takes a very important role in the foundation of the centre for cultural research at the University of Birmingham in 1916. The new developing trends in literary theory are more related with cultural studies. Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon write:

In 1970’s cultural studies began to develop more complex ways of theorizing the ideological and political role of culture. As a field of study, cultural studies have had important effects on the study of literature. It has challenged the idea of canonical literature, and affected the way literary texts are theorized and read. It has introduced cross-and interdisciplinary perspective. It has sought to theorize the role of literature in society in new ways, and to look at literary texts in relation to cultural institutions, cultural history, and other cultural texts, forms and practices. It has further focused attention on the circuit of literary production.4

The cultural critics want to resist already established things. They are against canons and they want to remove the big gap between high culture and popular culture.

In a sense, the world has been continuously changing due to the rapid development of Science. Literary theory has also been changing and inventing new terms and phrases with the passage of time. For instance, theory like Eco criticism and Postcolonial criticism emerge in the late twentieth century after deconstruction. Eco criticism is a critical approach of reading a literary text which begins in America in the late 1980’s. ‘Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the
physical environment’. The three major transcendentalists in America such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau are the major critics of this literary movement. Postcolonial criticism is an approach of reading a literary text that emerges in the 1990’s. It is the outcome of the colonialism which is applied for systems under the European power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said, Homi Bhaba, Bill Ashcroft and Jeremy Hawthorne are the major writers of Postcolonial criticism.

But all these theories are irrelevant in deconstruction. In addition to this, one can carry out research in deconstructive reading of the theories like Marxism, Feminism, Gay/Lesbian study, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. There is further area of research the deconstruction deconstructs itself. Since deconstruction is against definite and stable meaning the principles of deconstruction are apparently self contradictory.
Notes


3 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, xv.
