CHAPTER – II
MILIEU OF CRITICAL THEORIES
This chapter deals with milieu of critical theories. Before the thesis goes deep into the analysis of deconstruction, it would be pertinent to highlight a brief history of literary criticism. History of literary criticism can encourage learners to make comparison between the individual writers and their works chronologically. It can describe and explain the expression in literature of people during a period of time, in a place, and usually in a particular language. The critics’ development in their work and ideas can be better understood and appreciated with the background of the age they belonged to. It has been considered:

The history of literary criticism began with Xenophanes (b. c.570) took issue with the disrespectful representation of gods in Homer and Hesoid, and when Theagenes (fl. c 525) pressed for allegorical interpretation of Homer, seeing his gods and goddesses as symbols of human attributes and natural elements. Herodotus (c.484–c.420)
known as ‘father of history’, wrote his *Histories* in nine books, covering the struggle of Greece with Asia from mythical times to his own age. Meanwhile Greek drama was flourishing. Aeschylus (525–456), Sophocles (496–406) and Euripides (*c*. 480–406) together made the fifth century BC perhaps the richest age in the history for the production of tragic masterpieces, and Aristophanes (*c*. 448–*c*. 380) established a form of comedy which was to influence English writers such as Ben Jonson and Henry Fielding.1

Literary criticism became more scientific and philosophical in the time of Plato. Plato (421–348 B.C.) was the disciple of Socrates. He adopted the Socratic method of teaching in dialogues. It was after the execution of Socrates, Plato began writing. All of Plato’s works consisted of dialogues between various people but he himself never appeared among the participants. He was considered as the first philosopher to give criticism a systematic shape. His main ideas on literature could be found in the book, *Republic*. He used the word ‘imitation’ in connection with poet. However, it was used with the limited sense as mere representation or mere copying. Plato is among the classical philosophers whom Derrida deconstructs in his book, *Dissemination*. The Greek word *Pharmakon* means both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison’. Plato uses the word to writing as a ‘poison’. But Derrida treats the importance of the other sense of ‘remedy’ too. Derrida writes:

> The word *pharmakon* is caught in a chain of significations. The play of that chain seems systematic. But the system here is not simply, that of the intentions of an author who goes by the name of Plato. 2
Aristotle (384–322. B. C.) was the great disciple of Plato. His *Poetics* (330 B. C.) was the foundation of all critical theories. For him any form of imitation was art. Imitation was the root of art. Aristotle was following the observation of his teacher Plato. Plato viewed that art was twice removed from reality (God). On the other hand, Aristotle regarded art was a recommitment or re-entry to reality. Art was not for from nature. It was greater than nature. Therefore, Aristotle’s *Poetics* defines poetry and dramas were modes of imitation. Then he made a systematic investigation of tragedy. According to Aristotle, the object of imitation in drama was man in action. The imitation of man should be in the form of action. Aristotle divided the constituent of tragedy into six elements. They were plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle. He also spoke about the importance of plot and character in making tragedy a perfect work of art. His greatness was proved by the title given to him as the father of literary criticism. In spite of all Aristotle’s greatness Jacques Derrida deconstructs him in his book, *Margins of philosophy*.

Derrida connects the irreducibility of metaphor with *The Poetics*, where Aristotle is concerned with the nature of imitation. Imitation appears in Aristotle as both a natural mimicry, a natural resemblance, and as a relation of analogy which does not reduplicate what is imitated. That contradictory and undecidable structure conditions the word as name, as what is repeating, or imitating, what it names. The name is always an analogy of something, since it is not identical with what it names. Naming requires us to see a word as something, and to something as that word. Metaphor and analogical structure underlying it, cannot be
eliminated from language and provide the necessary context for naming.  

Roman poet Horace (65–8 BC) lived in the glorious Augustan era where the period of Roman civilization and culture reached its pinnacle of glory. His *Ars Poetica* (Art of poetry) was a poetic letter written to his friend Piso and his two sons as a piece of practical advice on poetic composition. It exerted tremendous influence during the middle Ages and the Neo-Classical age. There would be a good combination of the useful material in order to satisfy the audience in a poem. Because the readers had different attitudes towards a work of art some seek pleasure and other seeks benefit. However, both the readers sought a type of writing that instruct and delight at the same time. In this regard, Horace said:

> Either a poet tries to give good advice, or he tries to be amusing — or he tries to do both…A mixture of pleasure and profit appeal to every reader — an equal administration of sermon and tickle.  

Nevertheless another treatment of poetry appeared in *On the Sublime* by Cassius Longinus (217–73 B.C.). His work, *On the Sublime* was considered as the unique treatise on style. His ideas for sublimity were universal. He discovered five main sources of the sublime such as grandeur of thought; capacity for strong emotion; appropriate use of figures of speech; nobility of diction and dignified and elaborated composition.

During the Renaissance English poet Sir Philip Sidney defended the poetic imagination against attacks from English puritans in his *An Apology for Poetry* (1583).
The poet’s language was allegorical and figurative. According to him, the poet created an ideal world of imagination where virtues of protagonists invited readers to imitate or copy them.

John Dryden (1631–1700) was the dominating critic of seventeenth century literary criticism. His, Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668) was presented in the form of a dialogue. The conversation took place between four friends while travelling downstream in a boat on the Thames River. The discussion was through a debate between Crites who supported the ancient writers and Eugenius who spoke in favour of the modern English writer. Lisideius brought out the characteristics of French playwright and their plays in a contrasted manner with Neander who supported the English plays and playwrights. The discussion covered four topics: ‘Are the modern poets as good as the ancients? Are the contemporaries as good as the Elizabethans? Are the English as good as the French? And is rhyme better than blank verse for drama?’

Actually, ‘the four speakers are Crites, representing Sir Robert Howard, Lisideius representing Sir Charles Sidney, Eugenius, representing Lord Buckhurst, and Neander, representing Dryden himself’.

Meanwhile Alexander Pope juxtaposed both ancient and modern opinions in verse in his essay, “An Essay on Criticism” (1711). There was no dichotomy between modern writers’ way of addressing a contemporary audience and traditional critics’ insistence that rules borrowed from the practice of the ancients to be followed. Pope said: ‘Those Rules of old discovered, not devis’d, Are Nature still but Nature methodiz’d.’
Samuel Johnson’s “Preface to Shakespeare” (1965) was the only work where he applied polarity and balance. He may be called a critic with liberal humanism and classical realism. He observed both the merits and demerits of William Shakespeare’s plays and said ‘nothing can please many, and please long but just representations of general nature’. Therefore, he praised Shakespeare for faithful portrayal of universal human characters. But criticism does not mean to point only the negative aspect but also positive that might be in any writer. Hence, Johnson pointed out the demerit in the plays of Shakespeare especially in tragedies. Shakespeare sacrificed virtue to convenience in order to get profit of the drama. Samuel Johnson writes: he sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher in the eighteenth century advocated individual freedom and personal experience. But most 19th century European literature and criticism were influenced by German philosopher such as Immanuel Kant, Joseph Von Schelling, G.W. Hegel, Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe etc. These philosophers influenced the 19th century movement, Romanticism.

Rousseau is one of the philosophers whom Derrida deconstructs in the book, Of Grammatology. Derrida finds the practical consequence of language after reading Rousseau. ‘Rousseau is trying to dismiss writing as merely superfluous and added on, as supplementary in a damning sense’. Derrida extends further the term and quotes the Littré’s definition of suppléer (in French) which means ‘to add what is missing and to
supply a necessary surplus’. Thus Derrida finds the word ‘supplement’ and it is added on what is a lack in the original. Therefore, writing is not a superfluous at all.

Eighteenth century was an age in which poetry declined in the history of English literature. The outstanding English poets, Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Coleridge (1712–1834) gave a new memorable expression to the concept of poetry with various aspects and its role upon human beings. Coleridge and Wordsworth agreed to write *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a book of poems together. The preface of that book which is known as *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* was a critical document on literary criticism. It was also agreed that Coleridge should write on supernatural things and he should made them appear natural. Wordsworth on the other hand, should choose natural subject which should be given a supernatural appearance. Wordsworth wrote majority of the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge admitted that his contribution was small. But Coleridge wrote some of his best poems like *Christabel* in this book. It was interesting to note that both of them succeeded well in their efforts. But they had refreshingly different views on many important aspects of poetry and to creation.

In the Eighteenth century poetry declined because of its artificiality of language and lack of enthusiasm in the themes. That was an age of prose and reason. Therefore, poetry could not find much popularity and did not show the mark that the Elizabethan poetry showed. Revolting against such atmosphere of the eighteenth century poetry, Wordsworth gives his view regarding the concept of poetry. He declared in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*: ‘Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes
its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility’. This heralded the arrival of a new school of poetry, the romantic poetry. Wordsworth laid great emphasis on powerful strong feelings. These were the main points that the poets of the past totally neglected. Coleridge also wrote many of his views, experience and other things related to literature and literary criticism in his major critical work, *Biographia Literaria* (1817). He had given a brief and detail examination of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry and his views regarding the origin and elements of ‘meter’ and ‘poetic diction’. He also talked about ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’.

Wordsworth brought about a change in the so called ‘poetic diction’ and the greatest contribution in romantic poetry is the change in language. As Wordsworth considers the language of poetry to be of utmost importance, Derrida also considers the language to be of utmost significance in deconstruction.

P.B. Shelley (1792–1822) was one of the major Romantic poets who published a manifesto on the nature of poetry. Though Shelley was famous for his revolutionary poems he was remarkable for his outstanding critical work against Thomas Love Peacock’s essay “The Four Ages Poetry”. His “Defense of Poetry” (1821) was a direct reply to this “Four Ages of Poetry”. The Four Ages were those of Iron, Gold, Silver and Brass.

The Victorian poet and critic Mathew Arnold had given his view of poetry as ‘a criticism of life’. By reading poetry one could have an image of what really happened
in a particular period and at a particular place. We may give an example of Eliot’s poetry as a criticism of modern age. In his poem “The Wasteland” and “Ash Wednesday”, the readers could find images of sordid modern life. Similarly, it can be said that the Renaissance spirit was reflected in the poetry of Spenser and the plays of Christopher Marlowe. In the Restoration comedy, one could trace the kind of court life and manner of the people of that time. When one read the poetry of the transition poet like William Blake, Collins and Thomas Gray, one could understand the disappearing chain of Neoclassicism and the advent of Romanticism. So, we may say that Arnold’s definition of poetry is valid when he says:

Without poetry, our Science appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.

English literary criticism has become subjective and highly impressionistic in the nineteenth century. Earlier literary study was based on mostly the author’s biography. These tendencies intend for turning the attention of the readers from the writers to the work. M.H. Abhrams makes a very clear distinction between expressive criticism and objective criticism. He writes:

Expressive criticism treats a literary work primarily in relation to its author. It defines poetry as the expression, or overflow, or utterance of feelings, or as the product of the poet’s imagination operating on his or her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; it tends to judge the work by its sincerity, or its adequacy to the poet’s individual vision or state of mind; and it often seeks in the work
evidences of the particular temperament and experiences of the author who, consciously or unconsciously, has revealed himself or herself in it. Such views were developed mainly by romantic critics in the early nineteenth century and remain current in our time...Objective criticism deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called “extrinsic” relations to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by “intrinsic” criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements.15

The critics like Plato and Aristotle placed literature in their own philosophical way. It was Plato who considered art twice removed from reality. It is an imitation of imitation while his student Aristotle considered art as creative imitation of reality and hence, it is real and useful. In spite of the literary critics’ different views, it is through language that they express their ideas and practice of studying literature. It is in this context one can find the impact of language on literary criticism in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Russian Formalists, a group of linguists who flourished in between 1915–30 ignored the traditional concept of the separation of literature as an art and the realities of life. They were interested in establishing a scientific view that reality was there in the text itself and literature was an expression of reality through language. This new
concept was influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure’s concept of arbitrary relationship between *signifier* and *signified*; the sign and the concept. A sign had no meaning in itself. A sign had its meaning only in relation to other signs in the system. These ideas had laid the foundation for French Formalism. The French anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss also contributed much to the growth of French Formalism. Strauss applied the principles of structuralism in rituals, myths and kinship. He also constructed a new area of study called *structural anthropology*. 

Though critics like Cassius Longinus, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Dr. Johnson, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, I.A Richards, William John Crowe Empson Ransom, R.P. Blackmur and Cleanth Brooks focused on the language of literature, they did not pay serious attention on reality in text, i.e., the systematic and scientific study of language. But the basis for systematic study of literature in the context of modern linguistics began in Russia when Roman Jakobson founded the Moscow linguistic Circle in 1915.

In many ways Russian Formalism was similar to French Formalism. Due to the political changes in Soviet Union some of the members moved out and Prague became the center for the Prague School theory of language in 1926. But they shared common interest for the study of literature. They developed their ideas on the basis of Saussure. Structural linguistics was about the relationship of *signifier* and *signified*; *langue* and *parole*; and *diachronic* and *synchronic* studies of language with their concept of literature and literary text.
In the later period of formalism, the Bakhtin School led by Mikhail Bakhtin was concerned with the relationship between Literatures and the social and economic condition and ideological consideration. Bakhtin’s perception of language was that it is basically ‘dialogic’, every speech was made possible from previous speech and this process was extended far beyond any area of study.

After this, New Criticism came out as a form of literary criticism. New criticism practiced in England and America in 1920s to 1950s. ‘New Criticism’ is a term coined by John Crowe Ransom in his book *The New Criticism* (1941). Actually there was no typical new critic but there are important figures whose works were closely associated with new criticism’s development and characteristics. The major critics include: John Crowe Ransom, I.A.Richards, Cleanth Brooks, Ausin Warren, Allen Tate, Kenneth Burke, R.P. Blackmur, William Empson, Yvor Winters and W.K. Wimsatt.

I.A.Richards’s *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), and *Practical Criticism* (1929); Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren’s *Understanding Poetry* (1938); William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930); the critical essays of T.S.Eliot, and the essays of F.R.Leavis in his journal *Scrutiny* (1932-1953), Brook’s *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1949), the essays collected in Tate’s “Essays of Four Decades” (1979) and Wimsatt’s *The Verbal Icon* (1954) established practical criticism as a theory and method of literary criticism in England and America.

New criticism rejected the biographical historical method of reading a text which were prominent in the nineteenth century and twentieth century. New criticism
broke off the conventional practice to interpret a literary text by referring to the author’s life and his intention. The author’s biography and its relation to the society he belonged to were the sources for understanding the author’s intention. Such study dealt with the biographical and historical criticism of the text rather than the text itself. Therefore, New criticism concentrated on the isolated literary text. According to New criticism, the biography and history did not provide the information to examine the text because the reader was unable to have the social condition and the historical evidences of the period of its production and the author’s intention of the text. In the essay, “The Intentional Fallacy”, W.K.Wimsatt and MC. Beardsley say:

‘Intention’, as we shall use the term, corresponds to what he intended in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. In order to judge the poet’s performance, we must know what he intended. Intention is design or plan in the author’s mind. Intention has obviously affinities for the author’s attitude towards his work the way he felt, what made him write.  

Moreover the reader cannot have information through conversation from the past dead authors. Here Lois Tyson writes:

Sometimes a literary text doesn’t live up to the author’s intention. Sometimes it is even more meaningful, rich, and complex, than the author realized. And sometimes the text’s meaning is simply different from the meaning the author wanted it to have. Knowing an author’s intention, therefore, tells us nothing about the text itself, which is why New Critics coined the term intentional fallacy.
to refer to the mistaken belief that the author’s intention is the same as the text’s meaning.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Intentional fallacy} was coined by William Wimsatt and C. Beardsley in a jointly authored article with the title “The Intentional Fallacy” in 1946. The reader could refer to the author’s intention to find the meaning of the text, at the same time, to his personal response to find the meaning because the reader’s intention of a text might be created by his association from his personal life or his past experience. Therefore, the reader could not respond to what is in the text itself. For instance, the reader might not respond to a character based on his own feelings and produce a reliable interpretation. For this, New Critics coined another term \textit{affective fallacy} which means confusing the meaning of a text with how it makes the reader feel. A reader’s emotional response to a text did not provide reliable interpretation. It is ‘a term defined by Wimsatt and Beardsley (The Verbal Icon, 1954), as a confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does). It is said to be a critical error of evaluating a work of art in terms of it results in the mind of the audience’.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the affective fallacy bewildered the text with its affects, which was the emotion the reader produces. In this regard, Wimsatt and Baredsley wrote:

The literary text cannot be judged, by the way in which it emotionally affects the individual reader, the ‘affective fallacy’ is a confusion between the poem and its results. A text dealing with a highly emotive subject still has to be judged as a text, by the working of its ‘system of language’, and not by the intensity that its subject might generate.\textsuperscript{19}
The distinctive principle of the new criticism was close reading: ‘a detailed, balanced and rigorous critical examination of a text to discover its meanings and to assess its effects’. It was reflected in I.A. Richards’s *Practical Criticism* and William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

Richards’s examination on literature was empirical. He asked students in Cambridge to react on the unknown and unseen poems, sometimes without the title of the poems. The poem simply stood before the students as ‘words’ on the page.

I.A. Richards wrote in the book, *Practical Criticism*:

Richards gives a detailed account of the work submitted and then analyses the chief difficulties of criticism which it illustrates, namely, failure to understand the sense of a poem; insensitivity to the form and movement of words in sequence; wide deviations in responsiveness to imagery; the intrusion into reading of ‘mnemonic irrelevances’ based on purely adventitious personal associations; the reliance upon ‘stock responses’ which involve already established views and emotions; facile responsiveness which constitutes ‘sentimentality’, and its converse, an inhibited ‘hardness of heart’, susceptibility to ‘doctrinal adhesions’ actually or seemingly relevant to what a poet is saying; presuppositions; about fashions of technique due to past experience which has discredited them; and finally ‘general critical preconceptions’ which intervene between reader and poem.

Such practice of I.A. Richards was the close reading of the text and the readers made judgement based on the language of the text. William Empson, one of the students
of I.A. Richards examined the multiplicity of meaning in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). Empson’s term ‘ambiguity covers any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reaction. He divides the kinds of ambiguity attended to into seven types, though he accepts that this is a somewhat arbitrary classification and that the types overlap.’ 22

According to New Criticism, a literary work is a timeless, autonomous verbal object. A text may be read by various readers with different modes of reading. However, the text will remain the same forever. The meaning of the text is objective and is to be found through careful attention to the complex verbal appearance present on the pages of the text. In literature poetry is considered as a language saying things that cannot be paraphrased. Because a poem can mean more than what it says. New Critics referred to this practice as the *heresy of paraphrase*. Cleanth Brooks used the term in the book, *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). Brooks writes;

> If paraphrase means to say the same thing in other words then it is not possible to paraphrase a poem, because a poem means more than merely what it says. 23

A poem could not be explained simply by paraphrasing it. A poem was said to have an organic unit (consisting of different parts that are all connected to each other and make an inseparable whole) with form (the choice of words and its arrangement) and content (meaning) being inseparable. The organic unity was the criterion by which new critic judged the quality of a work. When a text had an organic unity, all the
elements of the text were working together in order to produce theme or the meaning of the work as a whole. By this organic unity the text established the complexity that a text must have. The complexity of a text was produced by the pluralistic meanings that work together. These pluralistic meanings were again a product of devices like ‘paradox’, ‘irony’, ‘ambiguity’ and ‘tension’. ‘Paradox’ was a statement which was contrary to the generally accepted opinion on any subject but really contained an essential truth.

A poet or a writer uses an ‘irony’ by using words whose meaning is the very opposite of what is intended to be expressed.

New critics considered paradox and irony were important because ‘paradox is responsible for much of the complexity of human experience and of the literature that portrays it… irony in a broader sense of the term, to indicate a text’s inclusion of varying perspectives on the same characters or events’. 24

‘Ambiguity’ was an uncertain and indeterminate as to what one said. It was an intention or expression to refer to several things. ‘Ambiguity occurs when a word, image, or event generates two or more different meanings…In literary language, however, ambiguity is considered a source of richness, depth and complexity that adds to the text’s value’. 25

Finally, ‘tension’ was created by the juxtaposition of the text’s opposing tendencies that was among its paradoxes, ironies and ambiguities. Therefore, tension referred to the combination of two opposite elements. The multiple meanings of a text generated by these devices must be combined to give the theme of the text.
In 1920, American born British poet and critic T.S. Eliot explored his essay, “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1919) published in his volume of essay entitled ‘The Egoist’ that no writer could succeed without utilizing both tradition and individual talent. In this essay, he wrote about the relationship between tradition and individual talent of a poet. Further, Eliot was not in agreement with Wordsworth’s definition of poetry as emotion recollected in tranquility. He called this formula as ‘an inexact formula’.25 He said that poetry was neither emotion nor recollection nor tranquility but it was a concentration out of which new things emerged. Eliot’s argument was that a great deal of conscious and deliberate effort was necessary in the creation of poetry. Reacting against the romantic insistence on a spontaneous overflow of powerful passion, Eliot advanced his theory of impersonality of poetry. He observed:

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality.27

Eliot’s criticism marked a complete break from the nineteenth century tradition and it gives a new direction to literary criticism.

Another influential critic of New Criticism was F.R. Leavis (1895–1978). In The Great Tradition (1948) he found ‘great tradition’ in the English novels. He traced the moral and social importance of fiction. In this regard, Harry Blamires wrote:

Leavis recognized that the novel justified the kind of critical attention in detail which formerly had been given only to poetry and drama. 28
Leavis praised novelists like George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence. He also spoke of an essential of organic culture which could nourish literature to life in the age of cultural crisis. Blamires wrote:

> The study of literature could perform a key function in rescuing the quality of life in an age of crisis when it was threatened by a civilization whose technology and media together debase standards and empty daily life of human content. The literature of the past can serve to keep alive an awareness of existence in the past at a time when the individual partook of a rich cultural life. 29

Thus, New Criticism’s close reading helps the readers to concentrate only to the words of the text. This is also an approach or another aspect of looking at a text. New criticism focuses exclusively on the literary text only but do not touch the structural aspect of literature.

Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1947) reacted against the definite area of new criticism’s perspective of close reading of the text. He felt that this view of new criticism was quite subjective and needed the value of an objective system. Frye viewed literature was an objective system and worked as a recurrence of mythic archetype because:

> Myth is and has always been an integral element of literature, the interest of poets in myth and mythology having been remarkable and constant since Homer’s time. 30
For Frye ‘Myth is a conception which runs through many areas of contemporary thought: anthropology, psychology, comparative religion, sociology and several others’. This view of Frye was subjective like New Criticism as he talked only mythic archetypes. After Frye, Structuralism appeared as a new approach of reading a text which systematically focused on the objective structure of the text and on various activities involved in perceiving the structures.

Thus, the present thesis has discussed the changing trend of literary theory from the classical period to the first half of the twentieth century. With the passage of time literary theory continued to grow more philosophical and objective, and it shifts its emphasis from the author to the text and the reader in the contemporary literary theory.

While discussing Derrida’s deconstruction, it is important to analyze social structure of Derrida’s time and the important philosophers who influenced Derrida and helped him in formulating his deconstructive strategy. Regarding the background that is essential in framing Derrida’s career is his nationality of being a Jew. Firstly, it is his sense of belonging to a marginal deprived culture and the tradition of Jew. This experience of marginalization has influenced him in the development of the theory, deconstruction.

Another important factor which influenced Derrida to the finding of his deconstructive analysis is his association with Tel Quel, an influential theoretical journal published in 1960 to 1983. It is edited by a committee but particularly associated with Phillippe Sollers. Tel Quel published varieties of interesting articles by
poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida, Julia Krestiva, Foucault, Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes. It also made popular the work of George Bataille (1897–19620). They dealt with the production of new forms of writing and theory. But in the year 1968, Tel Quel had developed its main concern with the pluralistic concepts of language in literature. They were also supported by left wing politics of the period. Therefore, they published their notions of language and writing against modern capitalist values of consumption and pluralistic meaning of language. These notions were expressed in the works by Krestiva, Barthes and Derrida. Derrida’s association with the journal and its members laid an important foundation for making him one of the greatest philosophers of the later half of the twentieth century.

The next important factor which became the foundation of Derrida’s philosophy is his reading of his past philosophers. It was a fact that Derrida read the books of many great philosophers line by line and contradicted their statement. However, some of the philosophers really influenced him. It was because of the influence of the great philosophers like Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Husserl, Derrida was on the list of the great contemporary philosophers. It is a fact that for every man’s success, there is a person behind him. Here, we are reminded of T.S. Eliot’s statement from his essay, “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1919):

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a German philosopher who had doubt about the possibility of knowledge of philosophy in general and its claims of truth. Derrida shared with Nietzsche this scepticism about philosophy. Derrida found that Nietzsche’s works were a systematic disbelief of metaphysics and doubt about the values of truth and meaning. Many philosophical thinkers believe that we may interpret the world in different ways according to our preconceived knowledge and our social context. But Nietzsche viewed that there were only perspectives because there was no physical reality beyond our interpretation. If we were bound by other’s perspectives or attitudes we could at least deliberately reverse perspective as possible, because it showed that the two terms of an opposition, the central and the marginal terms were merely associated with each other.

Thus, both Derrida and Nietzsche paid attention to the questioning, challenging and reversing of other philosopher’s views and perspectives. They made contrary of the opposition such as subject/object, truth/error, moral/immoral, white/black, god/man, conscious/unconscious, eternal/temporal etc. Nietzsche’s contradiction or separation of opposites was quite similar to Derrida’s ideas which had become a part of his strategy of disruption in deconstruction. They emphasized on the knowledge which was between two extremes: absolute certainty and absolute doubt.

Derrida shared his view that the text can never be fixed and as a result it is impossible to determine the meaning of a text. Nietzsche believed that we were unable to escape the constraints of language and thus had no choice but to operate within
language. Both Nietzsche and Derrida were aware of the reflexive problem of the language.

Nietzsche further viewed that there was no possibility of true, exact and literal meaning because any figurative derivation of language was an impulse towards the formation of metaphors. Nietzsche said:

Metaphor is viewed the transportation of words so that they are used in a secondary way, instead of their primary way with reference to what they name. Metaphor derives from nature, from the nature of objects, and is a secondary effect of nature transferring natural qualities between objects for the sake of comparison and linguistic effect. \(^{33}\)

Metaphor established an identity between two dissimilar things in order to equate of the unequal ideas. Derrida followed Nietzsche and made the conclusion that language was undoubtedly metaphorical working by the use of figurative speech. Both Nietzsche and Derrida anticipated that the metaphysics since the time of Plato repressed the fact that language was metaphorical. Therefore, any statement, claim, metaphysics and philosophy were all rested on shifting signifiers of figurative language. Derrida took for granted Nietzsche’s opinion that there was no ultimate fact or reality and as such there could not be any fixed interpretation. In many ways Derrida followed Nietzsche who focused on revaluation of all values which had become one of the practices of deconstruction.
Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the Austrian Physician was generally known for Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a theory of the human mind, a therapy for mental distress, an instrument of research, and a profession and a complex intellectual, medical and sociological phenomenon. Matthew Sharpe quoted what Derrida said to show his close association with psychoanalysis ‘putting into question the primacy of consciousness’.

Derrida examined the emergence of the metaphor of writing through the texts of Freud: *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). And another essay called “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad” influence Derrida to a great extent.

In the book, *Writing and Difference* Freud tried to visualize a metaphor which could explain how memory works and how pure virginal surface can find permanent traces. However, these virginal perceptions were the traces of past experiences and these past experiences influence present or virginal perception.

In *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Derrida found that there would be two kinds of neurons. They were:

The permeable neuron which no resistance and thus retain no trace of impression, would be the perceptual neurons; other neurons, which would oppose contact-barriers to the quantity of excitation, would thus retain the printed trace: they thus afford a possibility of representing memory.

The permeable neuron was a concept suggests the location of memory rather than the ways how memory worked. Therefore, Freud soon abandoned the first model
and began to think of the human psyche as a kind of script and a space of writing. He wrote:

Psychical content will be represented by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic. The structure of the psychical apparatus will be represented by a writing machine. 36

Then, in The Interpretation of Dreams (1899) Freud wrote that dream images as well as symbols were a kind of non-phonetic writing such as Egyptian hieroglyphics, primitive pictographs and Chinese ideograms and had more than a single meaning. According to Freud, dream images are comparable to the writing system. In Writing and Difference, Derrida says:

The model of hieroglyphic writing assembles more strikingly—though we find it in every form of writing— the diversity of modes and functions of signs in dreams. 37

Freud referred to alphabetic writing and non-phonetic writing in order to suggest the irregularities of temporary relations in dreams. He further suggested that dream symbols have more than one meaning. It might have several meanings like non-phonetic writing. We could never arrive at the exact interpretation of dream as in the case of writing. Freud noted that the Egyptian priests were the first interpreters of dream. They believed that dream and writing have the same mode of expression. Thus, Freud concluded that symbols and non-phonetic writing contained two or more meaning. In the same way if we dreamed of a terrible earthquake, flood, drought, ghost
and mountain it might mean many things. This thought of the interpretation of dream really had influenced Derrida’s critique of writing. Derrida himself had acknowledged deconstruction’s close connection to Freudian psychoanalysis and other philosophers and linguists. In the book, *Understanding Derrida* Matthew Sharpe expresses:

From the very early on, Derrida hence acknowledges a filial debt owed by deconstruction to psychoanalysis. Alongside, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Saussure and Lévinas, the theory inaugurated by Freud stands as one of his primary (re)sources. 38

Lastly in “Note on the mystic writing pad” (1925), Freud found a description of the psyche as a space of writing. For this, Freud used a writing device as a metaphor for the working psyche. Derrida found it meaningful while dealing with Freud’s achievement at the image of memory. The device mystic writing pad was a child’s toy for writing. It had three layers of a celluloid covering sheet. The surface was covered by a sheet of a wax paper and on top of this was a piece of clear celluloid. A child could do both the task of writing and erasing by using an erasure. Freud argued this phenomenon was very much like of memory. The bottom part of the wax slab functioned as unconscious part because it regained permanent traces of whatever was written on it. The top of the pad, celluloid and translucent sheets were like the conscious mind. Therefore, the conscious part which was not influenced by anything was always shaped by the traces of the unconscious mind. Therefore, any kind of perception which was given by meaning was a result of pre-existing information in the form of writing. It was because of the traces of the past experience that already
perceived. It was a never ending process. Thus, Derrida traced that writing supplemented perception before perception even appeared to itself. Derrida found that a text would represent psychical content and its essence was graphic.

Derrida’s key interest in Freudian psychoanalysis was that it taught and used a certain method of determining the meaning of a text. Freud suggested that the text was made up by concealment and revelation. A reader could not find the exact meaning of the words, and a text may conceal other meanings which are apparently absent at the present moment of reading. Simultaneously, the text also reveals the present meaning. The text, thus, conceals meaning as well as reveals its meaning. Freud suggested further that the reader should fix his gaze in order to determine the meaning of the text and sees the ‘play’ of meaning with the textuality of thought, language and so forth. Derrida wrote:

This tangle cannot be un-ravelled in terms of, and adds nothing to the contents of the dream text within the limits set up by itself. If, however, we have nothing vested in the putative identity of the text or dream, that passage is where we can provisionally locate the text’s moment of transgressing the laws it apparently sets up for itself, and thus unravel— deconstruct— the very text. 39

Derrida, thus, derived from Freud, the originator of psychoanalysis, an actual method of deciphering a text which has become an important strategy of deconstruction.
Next, Edmund Husserl (1859–1939) was also an important thinker who influenced Derrida in the development of his groundbreaking theory, deconstruction. Derrida began close reading on Husserl in his early career. ‘Derrida wrote the equivalent of an M.A thesis on Husserl.’ He translated Husserl’s short essay “The Origin of Geometry” (1989). His thought was a crucial influence on Derrida and therefore he conducted study on the phenomenology of Husserl and a critique of *phonocentrism*.

In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida inquired into Husserl’s entire work through a deep study of *Logical Investigations*. Husserl investigated into the nature of signs and said that the term ‘sign’ had a double meaning. Derrida wrote:

> HUSSERL BEGINS by pointing out a confusion: The word “sign” (*zeichen*) covers, always in ordinary language and occasionally in philosophical language, two heterogeneous concepts: that of *expression* (*Ausdruck*), which is often wrongly taken as a synonym for sign in general, and that of *indication* (*Anzeichen*). But, according to Husserl, there are signs that express nothing because they convey nothing one could call (we still have to put it in German) *Bedeutung* or *Sinn*. Such is the indicative sign [indice]. Certainly an indicative sign is a sign, as in an expression. But, unlike an expression, an indicative sign is deprived of *Bedeutung* or *Sinn*; *it is bedeutungslos, sinnlos*. But, nonetheless, it is not without signification. By definition there can be no sign without signification, no signifying without the signified. That is why the traditional translation of *Bedeutung* by “signification”, although
time-honoured and practically inevitable, risks confusing the whole text of Husserl. 41

Sign is either an expression or an indication. Derrida rejected Husserl’s notion of sign and claimed that signs were connected to each other. Signs occurred in connection and repetition. Further, each and every sign has a structure too. So, Derrida observed that the sign had a peculiar feature of supplement in deconstruction. That was, one sign supplemented the other sign. The sign supplied the deficient or essential thing; it was supposed to be supplementary. It was in this context that Derrida had coined the term supplement in deconstruction. According to Derrida, the term supplement referred to add what was missing and to supply a necessary surplus.

Husserl further suggested a phenomenology of signification in the Logical Investigation. However, Derrida’s study on the phenomenology of signification discovered that Husserl never fully understood the way in which signification was possible. Hence, Husserl himself engaged in the metaphysics of presence and a logocentrism that prefers speech to writing phenomenology occurs between ‘logos and phone’42 but Derrida emphasized on the privilege of writing (écriture).

Hence, Derrida’s deep study on Husserl led him to state that language was an endless play of signifiers. When a single signified was discovered, signifier referred to other signifiers and yet again referred to signifiers. This was a never ending process. Language was, thus, the play of difference. These differences were again produced by
signifiers and the signifiers and they were also the product of these differences. Derrida introduced differance which meant the sense of differing. Derrida, thus, viewed that differance was endlessly differed.

However, Derrida also enquired into the absolute meaning in the essay, “Meaning As Soliloquy”. He tried to find absolute meaning into several moments such as interior monologue, secluded life and pre-expressive intentions. Derrida wrote:

[I]f it is admitted that, as we have tried to show, every sign whatever is of an originally repetitive structure, the general distinction between the fictitious and effective use of the sign is threatened. This sign is originally wrought by fiction. 43

For Derrida anything related to language: name, statement or sentence might be fictional. Thus, in many respects Husserl had influenced much on Derrida in building up his ideas of deconstruction.

Another important influential philosopher was Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Derrida went through Heidegger including important early essay, “Ousia and Gramma: Note on a Note from Being and Time” in Margins of philosophy. He studies Heidegger and Nazism in Of Spirit and a series of papers entitled “Geschlecht”. In an interview with Henri Ronse he states:

What I have attempted to do would not have been possible without the opening of Heidegger’s questions. And first since we must
proceed rapidly here, would not have been possible without the attention to what Heidegger calls the difference between Being and beings, the ontico-ontological difference such as, in a way, it remains unthought by philosophy.\footnote{44}

Derrida’s involvement with phenomenology is based on his detailed studies of Husserl as well as his complex analysis of Heidegger. In one of Derrida’s interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine, Derrida said:

Heidegger’s text is extremely important to me, and that it constitutes a novel, irreversible advance all of whose critical resources we are far from having exploited.\footnote{45}

Derrida derived from Heidegger’s pattern of crossing out words after the word has written Beings, (Being) and let both deletion and stand because the word was inadequate but necessary. Heidegger also believed in difference in the system of language. Unlike Heidegger, Derrida finds the deeper concept of difference as \textit{differance}.

Derrida also finds Heidegger’s commitment to \textit{metaphysics of presence}. Heidegger’s critique of the question of the meaning of \textit{being} itself breaks one’s confidence in the \textit{logocentric} tradition that assumes an identity of ‘being’ and ‘meaning’. Therefore, Derrida writes in \textit{Of Grammatology}: ‘destroying the securities of onto-theology such a mediation contributes quite as much as the most contemporary linguistics’\footnote{46} Similarly with Heidegger, Derrida also believes in the power of language
to make thoughts and also agrees with Heidegger that language speaks man. That is to say, humans do not create meaning but rather inhabit the universe by impersonal impulses on language.

The word ‘deconstruction’ was derived by Derrida from Heidegger’s concept of destruktion which is the desire for the loosening up of the old tradition of Ontology. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘one distinction between the Heideggerean method of “destruction” and Derrida’s “de-construction” is the latter’s attention to the minute detailing of a text, not only to the syntax but to the shapes of the words in it’.

In building up the strategies of deconstruction, Derrida took its sources from different philosophers and linguist. One such was Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the Swiss linguist and the pioneer of structuralism. Derrida found structuralism as being caught in phonocentrism because Saussure explicitly privileged the spoken sign over and against the written sign and stated a natural bond between a sound and its sense. In fact, Saussure asserted that language and writing were different systems of signs and began the argument by not including the written signs from consideration. Writing was considered as something secondary because it was representative and not original. The letters of the written sign took us far from the real phenomenon of language. Saussure further declared that the essence of language lies not in relation with phonemes. According to Saussure, there were two important features of language— the difference and arbitrary nature of signs. It implied our ability to use the same phoneme as spoken by different persons in terms of sound, stress, pitch etc. but
for the similar alphabet. Saussure concluded that phonemes were identified by
distinction from other phonemes. So, Saussure stated in language, there were
differences without positive terms. This was what Derrida was studied as the
differential feature of the sign. The arbitrary nature of sign was the second feature of
language. Derrida declared:

There can be arbitrariness only because the system of signs is
constituted by the differences in terms and not by their plentitude.

For instance, it is purely arbitrary that the sound *cow* in English, *gai* in Hindi
and *Shanbi* in Manipuri referred to fully grown female domestic bovine animal. All
sound referred to animals in their respective language. Thus, Derrida derived from
Saussure that arbitrary and differential nature of language were correlative. Both of
them agreed that the two features of sign were connected. There was arbitrary nature of
sign due to the differential feature of language.

Derrida also followed Saussure’s view on the basis for the meaning of language.
Saussure’s notion was essential for understanding the differences in meaning. For
Saussure meaning and any *signifier* was related to other *signifier* in the language. For
example, the difference between the *signifier* ‘train’ (series of railway carriages or
tracks drawn by engine) and ‘tram’ (electrically powered passenger road vehicle
running on rail) are expressed easily by comparing ‘train’ with ‘tram’. From Saussure,
Derrida obtained this idea and concluded that each concept was included in a network
of concepts. The concept referred to each other by means of the play of differences. Thus, Derrida put his view that signifier and signified could not be separated. This was expressed in the book, *Positions*:

> The signified and signifier are the two sides of one and the same production.

There was no signified out the play of signifiers and, therefore, there was no transcendental signified. Derrida revealed this fact that every signified was also in the position of signifier. Derrida adopted this view from Saussure that play of difference was required to each and every sign. This led Derrida to further studies resulting in the introduction of a new concept differance.

It is important to analyse more deeply on Structuralism because Deconstruction is derived from Structuralism. The fundamental insights of Structuralism are discussed in the next, third chapter.
Notes


5 Blamires, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 88


20 Cuddon, *Dictionary*, 142.


24 Tyson, *Critical Theory*, 139.


30 Das and Mohanty, *Literary Criticism: A Reading*, 349.
31 Das and Mohanty, *Literary Criticism: A Reading*, 349.


33 Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction*, 71.


35 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 252.

36 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 250.

37 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 276.


40 Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction*, 2.


43 Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 56.


47 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 43.
