Conclusion

The Golden Rule of Identity Studies

Does identity studies mark the death knell for literary theory or more specifically postmodernism? Or was it 9/11 that was instrumental in finally bringing back historical and ideological hegemonic issues from a previous era, which were glossed over and therefore remained unsettled? Many pre-war issues have come back to haunt the various nations, the economy and people, and seem to suggest that it will continue to do so, until they are permanently settled. The Faustian impulse of play perpetrated by postmodernism failed to settle issues of oppression and the ever widening gap of Orientalist thought, which neo-conservative scholars and statesmen were quick to revert back to, as was seen in the response to 9/11 by the United States establishment. Does 9/11 therefore mark the actual death knell of postmodernism and spear a subsequent retrenchment to modernist thought. But for the time being certain fundamental changes are taking place in the area of literary studies. Does identity politics suggest any Golden Rule to follow – perhaps “To see the Other as the Other sees it-Self”, along with a First Commandment: Thou shall not discriminate?

Throughout this work, I have tried to show some of the structural changes that have taken place in the world context, in terms of the social, historical, the political, and the national and its effect in the formation of literary theory and in a broader perspective, its effect on literary scholarship. Historical changes have lead to a change in the ways various groups have been perceived over time but more importantly now, how they choose to perceive themselves. Events such as 9/11, Islamic terrorism, the economic rise of India and China, the election of an African-American for the post of the president of the USA, are all events along with countless others, that in turn leads to a change in the ways in which various groups perceive themselves. The process of change is constant, and in perceptions in the long term, there are no fixities. These perceptions not only open up newer areas of knowledge, but also newer ways of
perceiving knowledge. Thus theories which are grounded in classical Western theory may not always be compatible to the changes in perception of new collective voices in other parts of the world. The very 'life and times' of theory shows how the last few years of literary theory gives the impression that theory has over sped in its trajectory and instead of explaining practice, needed to explain itself for its own sake.

The greatest epistemological challenge that theory faced till date is particularly from the perspective of identity politics. Identity studies provides a more plausible and adequate basis for foundational beliefs that make interpretation and political action more judicious, meaningful and innovative. This allows the critical approach to discourse based on identity politics to become an active involvement in the workings of social change and away from plunging into the aporia of the literary enterprise. This is not necessarily an indication of disenchantment with the ephemeral nature of poststructural theory, but rather, to the disenfranchisement of active participation for change in the part of literary theory to deal with the everyday, oppressive measures of capitalist society, in a more direct and integrated manner. Poststructuralism does become a world view or a defining principle as any other meta-narrative, with the audacious hope that it is all prevailing and it works, and will ensure some form of justice to the oppressed. But many social groups still remain outside the orbit of its realms and procedures. Poststructuralism, sadly is still very much a part of a postwar rhetoric, and has not really been able to evolve outside of this bound, once again projecting that there can never really be an all-pervasive world view, as poststructural theory, very well, claims for itself. Just like the world, which cannot speak in one language, and neither would a world living with one language be a worthy world to live in.

Identity politics does not seem to be a real outcome of theory or even a reaction to theory, the latter may have lead to the reception of identity politics in literary studies as I have tried to show, but rather its appearance seems to be the result of a more deeper understanding and an urgency embedded in the human condition. The remnants of literary theory are certainly present but are made a little dormant today with the projection of identity studies - like the human tailbone - a legacy of the
evolution of literary scholarship! Identity politics is in actual, an attempt to identify or rather enforce agency in collective groups. It therefore becomes a location of agency. The narrative that may constitute a myth or a self-perpetuating narrative discourse to formulate identities, bases these myths and narratives on real components of differences and at times upon the discrimination meted out by dominant groups. Thus, even though, truths, myths, narratives may be constructed by privileged individuals within a group of the marginalized, the oppression and injustice that is felt is not in the realm of psychological hysteria, but in real terms, that affect an entire group.

To contradict a great poet, truth therefore cannot be beauty and beauty cannot be truth. But justice is beauty and the beautiful is always already just. It is the components of oppression and injustice that collectively gather voice, over time. The ability to cause change, or the agency required for change therefore can only be located in the collective realm of identity.

But this does not mean to say that it is only within the marginalized and therefore oppressed locations and the subsequent radicalization that a need for change takes place. Such a view would be a romantic fetish by a collective group of marginalized agents. The locus of change is embedded and imminent in the individuals “will to justice”, and is a foundation of being human.

It is only part of the human condition to reach out to its past or at least try to understand itself from the ideas from which it draws its lead. The Modern period in academia has tried to fracture itself from this lead or rather the burden of its past, and the postmodern has placed this “trace” in play. The will to justice, connects us to the build up of knowledge that has brought us wherever we consider ourselves to be today in formulating our very own sense of identity. In the process, many have used knowledge to segregate and oppress others, while still others have used it in a more enriching manner to celebrate their own condition. In other words, change has occurred not in the will per se but in the temporality of its condition, while it continues to be only human to tap our early knowledge, documents and resources.
The past doesn't always tell us, who we are, where we are from or where we are headed in all probability, but it can reveal and define for us what we want to remember ourselves by, who we want to be thought as, and where we want to go.