Chapter-I

Hermeneutics: Its Meaning, Nature and Scope

The ‘hermeneutics’ is a term, heard increasingly in the literary field of interpretation. In the modern world, where a number of sciences are developing day-by-day, hermeneutics sprouts as a science of interpretation. The term at once is unfamiliar to most of the educated people and at the same time potentially significant to a number of disciplines concerned with the interpretation, especially interpreting the Scriptures or texts.

‘Hermeneutics is concerned with the problems, methods and purpose of interpretations; therefore, it becomes a science of interpretation in itself. It helps to determine the true meaning of a text with accuracy. It includes several factors like history, culture, cultural diversities, language, distance of time between the author and the interpreter, the context etc. The hermeneutics is a science which helps in establishing the rules, principles and methodologies for the interpretation of religion and its Scripture, and also its relation to society.’

The discipline of hermeneutics emerged with the new humanist education of the 15th century as a historical and critical

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methodology for analyzing the texts. In a triumph of early modern hermeneutics, the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (c.1407-August 1, 1457) proved in 1440 that the "Donation of Constantine" was a forgery, through intrinsic evidence of the text itself. Thus, hermeneutics expanded from its medieval role explaining the correct analysis of the text.

The expounders present distinct exegesis on ancient manuscripts and Scriptures. It is the context which demands the science of interpretation. In fact, it helps to elaborate the necessary consonance between the concepts of interpretation in the field of hermeneutics. In the field of interpretation the term ‘hermeneutics’ has survived from ancient times. The references related to the usage of these terms can be easily found in the works of Aristotle and Plato. The eminent contributors in the field of hermeneutics are Wilhelem Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Indeed, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is, generally, acknowledged to be the founder of modern hermeneutics.

There is a pressing need for the introductory treatment of hermeneutics in the theological as well as non-theological context to clarify the meaning, nature and scope of the term. It is not an easy task to give the relevant and universal definition of hermeneutics. Today, the definition of hermeneutics is the subject of vehement controversy, so it is
necessary to explain deeply the history, meaning and nature of hermeneutics. In the present chapter, an attempt has been made to define hermeneutics in its more elaborate form.

**Historical Background of the Term ‘Hermeneutics’**

The term ‘hermeneutics’ finds its roots from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* which means ‘to interpret’ and the noun *hermeneia* means ‘interpretation’. Hermeneutics is a philosophical intellectual discipline which concerns with the nature and presuppositions of the interpretation of human expressions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term ‘hermeneutics’ means “the branch of knowledge that deals with (theories of) interpretation, esp. of Scripture.”

The hermeneutics is primarily a search for meaning. It grew from exegesis and exposition of scriptural text, and became the specialized science of interpretation. It is a study of the principles and methods by which a text of the past is interpreted to bring out its meaning relevant to the present context. Webster’s Third New International Dictionary defines it as “the study of methodological principles of interpretation and explanation; especially the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation.”

Such a definition may satisfy those who merely wish a working understanding of the word itself;

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those who hope to gain an idea of the field of hermeneutics will demand much more. Palmer makes it more valuable, when he acknowledges that hermeneutics is not a science of explanation or interpretation but rather of understanding. In fact, he says, “It is an historical encounter which calls forth personal experience of being here in the world......It tries to hold together two areas of understanding theory: the question of what is involved in the event of understanding a text, and the question of what understanding itself is, in its most foundational and ‘existential’ sense.”

The hermeneutics becomes more significant asset in the Greek history and mythology, when it is associated with the Greek God Hermes. Oxford English Dictionary says that Hermes“...in Greek mythology, represented as the God of Science, Commerce, etc., and the messenger of the gods; identified by the Romans with Mercury.” Offspring of the furtive passion of Zeus and the nymph Maia, the ingenious Hermes was born on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia. From his childhood age he proved to be a skilled thief, a nocturnal prowler, and a bringer of dreams. His first invention was lyre. Once in the evening he stole Apollo’s herd of sacred cows. One day all his theft and his tricks were discovered, he bowed to the will of Zeus and accompanied his brother to Pylos, where he had hidden the booty. “There he imprisoned Apollo and flock with branches from a tree that sprouted from the ground at his command and

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4 Ibid., p.10.
become strong bonds. Amused, he then produced impressive strains on his lyre. Apollo, charmed by his brother’s songs and forgetting the nasty tricks he had suffered, proposed a trade: he would keep the lyre and Hermes the cows. Another time Hermes created the syrinx, and Apollo was not long in wanting that shrill instrument, too. Thus, through a new exchange, Hermes obtained the caduceus, a magnificent and opulent wand that wards off misfortune and carries out divine intentions. In addition, Apollo granted Hermes a kind of prophetic power known to the Fates. Hermes’ thieving reveals the god’s precocity and at the same time explains the change in the character of Apollo, who, having been a shepherd, was thus established as a God of prophecy and of music. In the light of this, the theft becomes providential.”

“The Greek term has etymological associations with the name of the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods and the deity of boundaries. Some have seen this association as reflecting the inherently triadic structure of the act of interpretation: (i) a sign, symbol, message, or a text from some source requires (ii) a mediator or interpreter (Hermes) to (iii) convey it to some audience. So considered, this deceptively simple triadic structure implicitly contains the major conceptual issues with which hermeneutics deals: (i) the nature of a text; (ii) what it means to understand a text; and (iii) how understanding and

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interpretation are determined by the presuppositions and beliefs (the horizon) of the audience to which the text is being interpreted. Serious reflection on any of these issues reveals why interpretation is itself a philosophical issue and a subject of interpretation.”

“The folk etymology places the origin, Greek: *hermeneutike*, with Hermes, the mythological Greek deity whose role is that of messenger of gods. Besides being mediator between the gods themselves, and between the gods and humanity, he leads souls to the underworld upon death. He is also considered the inventor of language and speech, an interpreter, a liar, a thief and a trickster. These multiple roles make Hermes an ideal representative figure for hermeneutics. As Socrates notes, words have the power to reveal or conceal, thus promoting the message in an ambiguous way. The Greek view of language as consisting of signs that could lead to truth or falsehood is the very essence of Hermes, who is said to relish the uneasiness of the recipients.”

**Meaning and Nature of Hermeneutics**

In recent years, the powerful intellectual currents have brought hermeneutics once again to the common people. Hermeneutics deals basically with the four issues: “(i) What is it to understand a text and what are the conditions of its possibilities? (ii) How are the cultural

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sciences distinct in their methods and forms from the natural sciences?  
(iii) What are the conditions that make any sort of human understanding possible?  (iv) How can we resolve certain conceptual puzzles associated with concepts like understanding and meaning, and how might such a resolution helps us to understand the task of interpretation?”

The modern hermeneutics begins with the attempt to square the principle of interpretation with increasing awareness that the Scriptures are, after all, historical documents in which the textual truths and their meanings are internal to the time and place of their composition. In other words, hermeneutics plays a significant role in bringing the togetherness of both the subjective and objective dimensions of the interpretation. Here, interpretation is “a stylistic representation of a creative work according to one’s understanding of the creator’s ideas.” The concepts like exegesis, exposition, explanation, and analysis are different in their nature and form. But somehow all are related with the interpretation and become the integral parts of it. Or, these can also be said the types of interpretation. The hermeneutics is a science of interpretation; therefore, all these terms become the parts of hermeneutics.

9 Mircea Eliade, op. cit., p. 281.  
Early use of the word ‘hermeneutics’ places it within the boundaries of the sacred. The Divine message can only be understood on its own terms, received with implicit uncertainty regarding its truth or falsehood. This ambiguity of message is irrationality, a sort of madness inflicted upon the receiver. Only one who possesses a rational method of interpretation—an early hermeneutics—could derive the truth or falsehood (thus the sanity) of a statement.

The meaning of interpretation and understanding are different aspects. Understanding is the process related to our consciousness and sub-consciousness of mind. Whereas, a relevant interpretation should be the process of our very consciousness of mind in which an interpreter has to examine many factors like history, culture, society, language etc., related with the text. Hermeneutics focuses on the deciphering process of interpretation in which more attention is given to understand the true meaning of a work. In fact, understanding and interpretation are the two interlinked processes, which cannot be separated at any condition. The hermeneutics is not merely a theoretical discipline of the rules or methods of interpretation but it is a theoretical-cum-philosophical discipline in the modern world. A work is always stamped with the human touch, so a work requires a hermeneutics, a science of understanding. There are several methods for the scientific

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interpretation but in the case of interpreting texts, the interpretation calls for more subtle and comprehensive modes of understanding. “The field of hermeneutics grew up as an effort to describe these more specifically ‘historical’ and ‘humanistic’ modes of understanding...Thus, it involves two different and interacting focuses of attention: (i) the event of understanding a text, and (ii) the more encompassing question of what understanding and interpretation, as such are.”

Thinking, understanding and interpreting are the three marvellous gifts which a man possesses. These all are going parallel to our daily life. In fact, from ‘the time we wake up in the morning until we sink into sleep, we are naturally continuing these processes. On waking, we glance at the clock and interpret its meaning: we recall what day it is, and in grasping the meaning of the day we are already primordially recalling to our self the way we are placed in the world and our plans for the future etc. Perhaps then, the interpretation is the most basic act of human thinking. The language plays an important role in it—man’s worshiping, loving, social behaviour, even the shape of his feelings is conformed to language. If we see it deeply, it becomes apparent that language is the medium in which we live, we move and have our being. Here, interpretation then is a complex and pervasive phenomenon. Yet how complexly, how deeply, does the literary critic conceive it in his understanding? A work of literature is not an object we understand by

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conceptualizing or analyzing it; it is a voice we must hear, and through
‘hearing’ (rather than seeing) understand. Therefore, understanding a
literary work is not a scientific kind of knowing; in fact, it is a historical
encounter which calls forth personal experience of being here in the
world.

Thus, hermeneutics is the study of understanding. It holds
together two areas of understanding theory: the question of what is
involved in the event of understanding a text, and the question of what
understanding itself is. This constant attempt, which deals with the
phenomenon of understanding, as it goes beyond the textual
interpretation, gives hermeneutics a potentially broad significance for all
the disciplines of humanities. Its principles are not only applied to the
works of texts but to any work of art. Consequently, hermeneutics is
fundamental to all the humanities.

The word and more common verb *hermeneuein* and the noun
*hermeneia* points back to the wing footed messenger—God Hermes, from
whose name the words are apparently derived. Significantly, Hermes is
associated with the function of transmuting what is beyond human
understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp. This
message-bringing process of understanding associated with the Hermes
is implicit in all of the three basic directions of meaning of *hermeneuein*
and *hermeneia* in ancient usage. These three directions, using the verb
form *hermeneuein* for purpose of example are (i) to say; (ii) to explain; and (iii) to translate. All these three meanings may be expressed in the verb ‘to interpret’, yet each constitutes an independent and significant meaning of interpretation. Interpretation can refer to three different issues: oral recitation, explanation, and translation. Yet one may note that the foundational ‘Hermes process’ is at work in the above three cases which is foreign separated in time, space, strange, made familiar, comprehensible, something requiring representation, explanation is somehow brought to understanding is interpreted.

**Hermeneuein as ‘to say’**

The first basic direction of the meaning of *hermeneuein*is ‘to express’, ‘to assert’, or ‘to say’. This direction is related with the ‘announcing’ function of Hermes. This suggests that the minister in bringing the Word is announcing and asserting something. His function is not merely to explain but to proclaim. Hermes brings fateful tidings from the Divine and explains it to the present people with deep detail. In this way, Hermes becomes a ‘go-between’ from God to man. As compared to interpretation saying, asserting, or proclaiming is an important act of interpretation. Within this same first direction of meaning is some different shade suggested by the phase ‘to express’, which still carries the meaning of ‘saying’ but is a saying which is itself an interpretation. In this sense, interpretation is a form of saying. Likewise, oral saying or singing is an interpretation.
Saying or oral interpretation reminds us the power of spoken language and the relative weakness of written language. Plato emphasizes the weakness and helplessness of written language in his *Seventh Letter* and also in *Phaedrus*. In fact, written language calls for re-transformation into its spoken form. It calls for its lost power. We should not forget that language in its original form is heard rather than seen. That is why oral language is understood more easily than written language. Thus, it can be said that the oral interpretation has a magical power to create the visual effects by hearing only.

Oral interpretation or saying is not a passive response to the signs rather an active response. It is not like a record being played on a phonograph simply on a piece of paper. In fact, it is a creative matter, a performance like that of a pianist interpreting a word of music. An interpreter must have to grasp the meaning of a text or a hymn in order to express even in one sentence. Oral interpretation has two sides: it is necessary to understand something in order to express it and understanding itself comes from an interpretive reading-expression. The task of oral interpretation is not purely a technical one of expressing a fully transcribed meaning. In fact, it is philosophical and analytical which can never be separated from the problem of understanding itself. The problem of understanding is the significant subject of hermeneutics.
Every silent reading of a literary text is a disguised form of oral interpretation. Thus, the principles of understanding can be applied to the literary interpretation. A literary criticism is an enabling act in order to make up for the weakness and helplessness of the written word. In fact, it tries to put back in work the dimensions of speech. These questions which always arise in our minds need to be considered seriously. Would a literary critic not give a different interpretative performance as compared to oral interpretation? Would he not actually be offering a complete interpretation? Would this be not a comparison with its own imaginative performance? If it is written, then would he not be searching for other written words to replace the lost sounds of the words?

It is supposed that the text itself has its own ‘being’ in the words themselves, in their arrangement, in their intentions, as being the work of a special kind. Here, hermeneutics works to enable the text to speak itself. In the light of this, the new critic would undoubtedly agree that a truly enabling criticism is one that is aimed to more adequate oral reading of the text itself so that the text can again exist as a meaningful oral happening in time: its true nature and integrity can shine forth.

The present consideration of the first direction of meaning in the ancient usage of *hermeneuein*—interpretation as ‘saying’ and as ‘expressing’ has led to the assertion of some fundamental principles of interpretation, both literary and theological.¹⁴

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Hermeneuein as ‘to explain’

The second direction of meaning in hermeneuein is ‘to explain’. Before the commencement of any consideration, let us take a glance on the meaning of the word ‘explain’ in the context of interpretation. According to Oxford English Dictionary the term ‘explain’ means, “Make clear or intelligible (a meaning, difficulty, etc.); clear of obscurity or difficulty; give details of (a matter, how, etc.), speak one’s mind against upon... State the meaning or significance of; interpret. Make clear one’s meaning; give an account of one’s motives or conduct... Account for; make clear the cause or origin of.”\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, the term ‘explanation’ means, “...a statement, circumstance, etc., which makes clear or accounts for something. A declaration made with a view to mutual understanding and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{16} Interpretation as an explanation emphasizes the discursive aspect of understanding; it points to the explanatory rather than expressive dimensions of interpretation. The words are not merely saying something; actually, they are something expressing, explaining and rationalizing it to make it clear. If someone is explaining a situation, indeed, he is interpreting something. Hence, explanation is also a form of interpretation. Let us consider the dimensions and significance of this second form of interpretation.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, p. 895.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 895.
\textsuperscript{17} Richard E. Palmer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.
“The cryptic messages from the Oracle at Delphi did not interpret a pre-existent text; they were “interpretations” of a situation... They brought something to expression...but what they brought was at the same time an explanation of something—something formerly unexplained. They brought into a verbal formulation of the “meaning” of situation; they explained it, sometimes in words that concealed as much as they revealed. They said something about the situation, about reality, in words. The meaning was not hidden in the style or manner of saying; this was not a central consideration. Rather it was explanation in the sense of saying something about something else. Thus, while in one sense the Oracles simply said or enunciated, as explanation they moved towards a second movement of interpretation—to explain or account for something.”

Aristotle in his treatise *Peri hermeneias* defines interpretation as “enunciation”. He further defines *hermeneia* as referring to the operation of the mind in making statements which have to do with the truth or falsity of a thing. In this sense, the interpretation is the primary operation of the intellect in formulation or understanding a true judgment about a thing. According to Aristotle, a prayer, a command, a question, or a depreciative sentence is not a statement in fact, it is the secondary form of a statement.

The enunciation in the context of interpretation is not to be confused with logic, for logic proceeds from comparing enunciated

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statements. In fact, enunciation is the formulation of the statements themselves; it is not the process of reasoning from known to unknown things. Aristotle divides the basic operations of the intellect into three different parts; (i) the understanding of simple objects, (ii) the operations of composing and dividing, and (iii) the operation of reasoning from known to unknown things. According to him, the enunciation deals only with the constructive and divisive operation of making statements. Therefore, the enunciation is neither logic, nor rhetoric but it is more fundamental. In fact, it is enunciation of the truth of a thing as statement.

The above discussion makes it clear that the enunciation is not merely an understanding of simple objects but it deals with the processes involved in constructing a true statement. The purpose of the process is not to move the emotions or to bring about political action but to bring understanding as a statement.19 “Is this not the first rather than the second direction of meaning? That is, is this not to express or say, rather than to explain? Perhaps so; but one should note that the expressing had to do with style, and saying was almost a Divine operation: it announced the Divine rather than enunciating the rational.”20

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19 Ibid., p. 21.
20 Ibid., p. 22.
Explanation, then, must be seen within the context of a more basic act of interpretation. The interpretation that occurs even in the way one turns towards a text. The explanation relies on the tools of objective analysis but the selection of the tools is already an interpretation of the task of understanding. Analysis is also a form of interpretation; feeling the need for analysis is too an interpretation. Therefore, analysis is in fact not the primary interpretation but a derivative form. It has preliminarily set the stage with an essential and primary interpretation before it ever begins to work with the information or data. Another way of saying this is to state: that the explanatory interpretation makes us aware that explanation is contextual and horizontal.

As the above two directions of interpretation in *hermeneuein* (saying and explanation) are considered, the complexity of the interpretive process and the way, the method in which it is grounded in understanding begins to average. “The discussion presented here, however has not dealt with feelings but with the structure and dynamics of understanding, the conditions under which meaning can arise in the interaction of reader with the text, the way in which all analysis presupposes an already shaped definition of the situation. Within the framework of such considerations the truth of Georges Gurvitch’s observation is seen—that object and method can never be separated.”21

Hermeneuein as ‘to translate’

The significance of the third and last dimension of the meaning of hermeneuein is almost as suggestive to hermeneutics and theory of literary interpretation as the first two.22 The term ‘translate’ means “turn from one language, or express in other words.”23 In this dimension, ‘to interpret’ means ‘to translate’...Translation is a special form of the basic interpretative process of 'bringing to understanding'. In this case, one brings what is foreign, strange, or unintelligible into the medium of one’s own language. Like the God Hermes, the translator mediates between one world and another. The act of translation is not a simple mechanical matter of synonym finding, as the absurd products of translation machines make only too clear, for the translator is mediating between two different worlds. Translation makes us aware of the fact that language itself contains an overarching interpretation of the world to which the translator must be sensitive even as the translator’s individual expressions. The language is clearly a repository of cultural experience; we exist in and through this medium we see through its eyes.24

'Demythologizing' is the term, almost synonymous to the term translation. Demythologizing is the process of removing the mythical elements from a legend, or a cult etc.; especially in theology it is the

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22 Ibid.
24 Richard E. Palmer, op. cit., p. 27.
process of reinterpreting the mythological elements of the Bible. In other words, demythologizing is said to be an attempt to separate the essential message from the cosmological mythology.

The translation as the explanatory phase of interpretation is “an approach to literature which sees the work as an object apart from perceiving subjects easily and automatically avoids the question of what really constitutes the human significance of a work...” A great work of the text can be made humanly relevant through interpretation. The task of interpretation as well as translation is to bring what is strange, unfamiliar, and obscure in its meaning into something meaningful that speaks our language. Thus, the purpose of relevant interpretation is the “sense of reality and the way of being-in-the-world represented in the work must be the focus of an enabling literary interpretation, the foundation for a reading of the work that can be grasped the human significance of its action. The metaphysics, i.e., definition of reality and ontology in a work are foundational to an interpretation which makes a meaningful understanding possible. Translation, then, makes us conscious of the clash of our own world of understanding and that in which the work is operation.

The modern hermeneutics finds in translation and translation theory a great reservoir for exploring the hermeneutical
problem. Indeed, hermeneutics in its early historical stages always involved linguistic translation, either as classical philosophical hermeneutics or as biblical hermeneutics. The phenomenon of translation is the very heart of hermeneutics in which one confronts the basic hermeneutical situation of having to piece together the meaning of a text, working with grammatical, historical, and other tools to decipher an ancient text. Yet these tools are, as we have said, only explicit formalizations of factors which are involved in any confrontation of a linguistic text, even in our own language. There are always two worlds, the world of the text and that of the reader, and consequently there is the need for Hermes to translate from one to another.

This discussion of the origin of hermeneuein and hermeneia and the three directions of their meaning in ancient usage was undertaken in the context of hermeneutical problem in general. Because of this, it serves as an introduction to some of the basic issues and concepts of hermeneutics. “The modern definitions of hermeneutics will emphasize now one, now another direction of the rich reservoir of meaning resident in the Greek roots from which the term ‘hermeneutics’ was derived. The field of hermeneutics does well to return ever and again to the significance of the three directions of meaning in interpretation as saying, explaining, and translating.”

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Contributors of Hermeneutics

With a view to establishing focus on hermeneutics, this research work will attempt to give a fairly comprehensive survey of the field of modern hermeneutics, focusing on the ideas of its most prominent representatives more or less in chronological sequence, and providing some critical assessment of them along the way. The theories of hermeneutics as provided by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer carried on this scholarly tradition.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher (Nov. 21, 1768 to Feb. 12, 1834) explored the nature of understanding in relation to deciphering sacred texts as well as all human texts and modes of communication. The interpretation of a text must proceed by framing the content asserted in terms of the overall organization of the work. He distinguishes between grammatical interpretation and psychological interpretation. The former studies shows that how a work is composed from general ideas. The latter considers the peculiar combination that characterizes the work as a whole. Schleiermacher said that every problem of interpretation is a problem of understandings. He further defined hermeneutics as the art of avoiding misunderstanding. In fact, he provides a solution to the avoidance of misunderstanding: knowledge of grammatical and psychological laws in trying to understand the text and the author. There
arose in his time a fundamental shift from understanding not only the exact words and their objective meaning to the individuality of the author.28 Both of the concepts reflect “Schleiermacher’s own indebtedness to romantic thinkers who had argued that any individual’s mode of expression, however unique, necessarily reflects a wider cultural sensibility or spirit (Geist).”29

**Wilhelm Dilthey**

Wilhelm Dilthey (Nov. 19, 1833 to Oct. 1, 1911) broadened hermeneutics even more by relating interpretation to all historical objectification. Understanding moves from the outer manifestations of human action and productivity to explore their inner meaning. In his last important essay ‘The Understanding of other Persons and their Manifestations of Life’ (1910), Dilthey makes it clear that this move from outer to inner, from expression to what is expressed, is not based on empathy. The empathy involves a direct identification with the other. The interpretation involves an indirect or mediated understanding that can only be attained by placing human expressions in their historical context. He further explains that understanding is not a process of reconstructing the state of mind of the author, but what is expressed in the work.30

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“Dilthey’s research on Schleiermacher and his account of the process of understanding the activity of a religious thinker constituted an important component of his work on the theory and practice of intellectual history. Yet his major contribution to religious studies lies in his theory of the human studies and its implications for the scientific investigation of religion. Dilthey’s theory of the human studies may be understood as an attempt to establish the idea that these disciplines have a distinctive subject matter and method that differentiate them from the natural sciences... Much of Dilthey’s work in the philosophy of the human sciences was concerned with the elucidation of this process of understanding and its distinctive epistemological quality, which he called the hermeneutical circle.”\(^{31}\) It is noteworthy here that the main aim of Dilthey’s philosophical work was to develop a critique of historical reason that would resolve the question of how knowledge in the human sciences is possible.

**Martin Heidegger**

Martin Heidegger (Sep. 26, 1889 to May 26, 1976) is a German philosopher known for his existential and phenomenological explorations of the question of being.\(^{32}\) Heidegger argues that philosophy is preoccupied with what exists and has forgotten the question of the ground of being. We find ourselves always already fallen into a world that

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already existed; but he insists that we have forgotten the basic question of what being itself is. This question defines our central nature. He argues that we are practical agents, caring and concerned about our projects in the world, and allowing it to reveal, or unconcealed it to us. He also says that our manipulation of reality is often harmful and hides our true being as essentially limited participants, not masters, of the world which we discover. Heidegger wrote about these issues in his best-known book, *Being and Time* (1927), which is considered to be one of the most important philosophical works of the 20th century. Heidegger believed all investigations of being have historically focused on particular entities and their properties, or have treated being itself as an entity, or substance, with properties. Heidegger’s philosophy is founded on the attempt to conjoin what he considers two fundamental insights: the first is his observation that, in the course of over 2,000 years of history, philosophy has attended to all the beings that can be found in the world (including the world itself), but has forgotten to ask what being itself is. This is Heidegger’s question of being, and fundamental concern throughout his work. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger criticized the abstract and metaphysical character of traditional ways of grasping human existence as rational animal, person, man, soul, spirit, or subject. *Dasein*, then, is not intended as a way of conducting a philosophical

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anthropology, but is rather understood by Heidegger to be the condition of possibility for anything like a philosophical anthropology.\textsuperscript{34} Heidegger focuses less on the way in which the structures of being are revealed in everyday behaviour, and more on the way in which behaviour itself depends on a prior openness to being. The essence of being human is the maintenance of this openness. Heidegger contrasts this openness to the will to power of the modern human subject, which is one way of forgetting this originary openness.\textsuperscript{35}

**Hans-Georg Gadamer**

Hans-Georg Gadamer (Feb. 11, 1900 to Mar. 13, 2002) was a German philosopher of the continental tradition. Gadamer’s philosophical project, as explained in *Truth and Method*, was to elaborate the concept of philosophical hermeneutics, which Heidegger initiated but never dealt with at length. Gadamer’s goal was to uncover the nature of human understanding. In this book Gadamer argued that the truth and the method were at odds with one another. He was critical of two approaches to the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). On the one hand, he was critical of modern approaches to humanities that modelled themselves on the natural sciences (and thus on rigorous scientific methods). On the other, he took issue with the traditional German approach to the

\textsuperscript{34} Jacques Derrida describes this in the following terms: "We can see then that Dasein, though not man is nevertheless anything other than man." Jacques Derrida, *The Ends of Man* in *Margins of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, p. 127.

humanities, represented for instance by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, which believed that correctly interpreting a text meant recovering the original intention of the author who wrote it.\(^{36}\)

‘In contrast to both of these positions, Gadamer argued that people have a ‘historically affected consciousness’ \((wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein)\) and that they are embedded in the particular history and culture that shaped them. Thus, interpreting a text involves a fusion of horizons where the scholar finds the ways that the text’s history articulates with their own background.\(^{37}\) *Truth and Method* is not meant to be a programmatic statement about a new hermeneutic method of interpreting texts. Gadamer intended *Truth and Method* to be a description of what we always do when we interpret things (even if we do not know it): “My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing”.\(^{38}\)

**Scope of Hermeneutics**

“The sacred books of eternal truths are evergreen gardens in which the enervated, exhausted, beaten, broken, dismayed and desperate souls take rest to recover their lost strength. They are ever full

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and flowing springs of nectar from which the diseased mankind has been sipping the elixirs of life.”39 The true meaning of a Scripture is the solid historical reality of the continuum of actual meanings over centuries to actual people. It is as mundane, or as transcending, or both, as have been those actual meanings in the lives and hearts of persons.40

Hermeneutics is the study of the theory and practice of interpretation. Traditional hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of written texts, especially texts in the areas of literature, religion and law. Traditional type of hermeneutics is biblical hermeneutics which concerns the study of the interpretation of Bible. Modern hermeneutics encompasses everything in the interpretative process including verbal and non-verbal forms of communication as well as prior aspects that affect communication, such as pre-suppositions, pre-understandings, the meaning and philosophy of language, and semiotics.41

The terms ‘hermeneutics’ and ‘exegesis’ have been used interchangeably. However, hermeneutics is a more widely defined discipline of interpretation theory as it includes the entire framework of the interpretive process which encompasses all forms of communication: written, verbal and non-verbal. The exegesis, on the other hand, focuses

39 Sher Singh Sher, Glimpse of Sikhism and Sikhs, Metropolitan Book Co. (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. 47.
primarily on the written text. Philosophical hermeneutics refers primarily to the theory of knowledge initiated by Martin Heidegger and developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, and sometimes to the theories of Paul Ricoeur.42

“The religion, in the words of Rudolf Otto, is based on the experience of the Numinous. The same experience is enshrined in the Scriptures. Since the experience of the Numinous is primarily non-rational, the nature of the scriptural language most of the time is symbolic, metaphorical and allegorical. In order to make the mystical experience intelligible and accessible to the common man the explanation, the interpretation of the Scripture is needed.”43

The hermeneutics in its vast scope here sets the task of furnishing the theoretical justification for the determinacy of the object of interpretation and of setting forth norms by which the determinate, changeless, self-identical meaning can be understood. Therefore, hermeneutics is not simply a science of interpretation but a method of arriving at correct interpretation. Hermeneutics deals with the significance of the text for us today, and with the structures or mechanisms the verbal meaning becomes meaningful to us. Such is the province of literary criticism and can be said other areas of

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hermeneutics. The hermeneutics plays an important role in its scope when “hermeneutics, strictly speaking, is the modest, and in the old-fashioned sense, philological effort to find out what the author meant... What are we to say of this latest definition of hermeneutics as the rules of the modest yet foundational effort to determine the verbal meaning of a passage? The most striking thing about it is what it leaves out; hermeneutics is not concerned with the subjective process of understanding or with relating an understood meaning to the present (criticism), but with the problem of umpiring between already understood meanings so as to judge for the philologist who must decide among several possibilities what is the most likely meaning of a passage.”

The hermeneutical problem as a whole is too important and too complex to become the property of a single school of thought. The Divine directions in hermeneutical theory illustrate in themselves a hermeneutical principle: interpretation is shaped by the question with which the interpreter approaches his subject. One-sided and restrictive definition of hermeneutics may serve limited purposes, but care should be taken not to make them absolute. Certainly, debate on specific issues like the character of understanding, historical understanding and historical objectivity, is in order. “When the focuses of hermeneutics are defined to include a general phenomenology of understanding and a

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45 Ibid.
specific phenomenology of the event of text interpretation, then the scope of hermeneutics becomes vast indeed. As has been said, however, the scope of the hermeneutical problem is such that hermeneutics cannot isolate itself as a close and specialized field. Indeed, one of the great impediments to the historical development of non-specialized hermeneutics has been that it has no home in an established discipline. The stepchild of theology, the ungainly offspring of philology, non-theological hermeneutics is only now coming of age as a field. However, with the interest in the subject being presently stirred by the new hermeneutics, Betti, Gadamer, Hirsch, Ricoeur, and the later Heidegger, there is reason to hope for a brighter future. If so, hermeneutics may indeed be in a fairly early stage of its development as a general discipline.”

In the context of hermeneutics as well as in the interpretation, it is a debatable question, of course, as to who is attacking and who is defending. The present interpretations may be the future’s misinterpretations because the truth of the word cannot be shared as the same, it demands personal transformative engagement. It is as same as like every living organ, language also develops with the changes of time and some old words become obsolete and their meanings become vague. The new words come into use in place of the truths demand the responsibility of a continual re-contextualization.

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46 Ibid., p. 69.
Every interpretation of a text is not complete and final interpretation. Therefore, every interpretation itself is the subject to reconsideration with the change of time. Some orthodox scholars viewed that the hermeneutical study of their own particular Scripture is not possible. This is perhaps for the reason that they do not want to tolerate critical understanding of their religious Scripture. Every new idea faces reaction from such orthodox people as far as scriptural interpretations are concerned. In fact, these views are said to be the calls for a return to objectivity, for a reaffirmation that the study of a Scripture involves leaving behind the historian’s or an interpreter’s own present standpoint. The Science and technology is rapidly developing by effecting a change in the thinking and attitude of the people. In order to meet this challenge a new interpretation of the Scripture has thus become necessary.

So, the hermeneutical debate goes on. On the one side are the defenders of objectivity and validation, who look to hermeneutics as the theoretical source for norms of validation; on the other side are the phenomenologists of the event of understanding, who give stress on the historical character of this event; and consequently, the limitations of all claims to objective knowledge and objective validity.

While concluding, it can be said that understanding the true meaning of the text of a holy Scripture with accuracy has always been a difficult and complex problem in all the religions of the world. However,
hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, has helped us to establish certain rules, principles and methodologies for the interpretation of Scriptures. It is not merely a theoretical discipline of the rules or methods of interpretation, but it is a theoretical-cum-philosophical discipline. It is primarily a search for meaning through these methods and principles which bring out the textual meaning relevant to the present context.

In spite of its great significance, hermeneutics has been the subject of eager controversy as it has failed to provide any universally accepted definition. Still we cannot ignore its important role in the study of Scriptures. What we need is the deep knowledge about hermeneutics which can lead us to overcome the difficulty of understanding the exact meaning and underlying spirit of the Scriptures.