Presently, when in the ‘postmodern’ age — “a provincial age of instantaneous electronic communication” as it is called — “the privileged status of the text and the coherence of cultural activity are increasingly destabilized”\(^1\) one finds little virtue in trying to revive an ideal past when “critics talked with comfortable good sense about the writer’s personal experience, the social and historical background of the work, the human interest, imaginative ‘genius’, and poetic beauty of great literature”\(^2\). In fact, in the postmodern period, particularly during the late twentieth-century, the literary-critical world has seen traditionally totalizing theories called into question and their unquestioning exponents losing their authority as well as their claim to reveal hidden meaning of the text. However, it cannot be denied that those who inspired the most acute languages of modern literary criticism — Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and others — tried utmost to make the poem or the novel totally explicable by their all powerful theories. Roland Barthes moved from complex systems of coded semiotic meaning to a position of apparently capricious textual

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enjoyment; Pierre Macherey and Louis Althusser argued that the ideology expressed by a text was a practice largely independent of the socio-economic infrastructure; and Jacques Lacan, moving beyond Freud’s study of the process whereby the artist unwittingly impressed his own symbolic meaning into the work of art, found that there was no essential ‘self’ behind the shifting mental hall of mirrors which constituted the ‘subject’ of thought and discourse. In other words, even in the proliferation of critical concepts and schools one often gets such glaring insights as prove helpful for a properly convincing analysis and evaluation of literary texts.

Viewed in this perspective, it is worthwhile to concentrate on the psychoanalytical approach to literature developed by Jacques Lacan3, the French psychoanalyst, psychiatrist, and post-structuralist critic whose work is strikingly an original attempt to rewrite Freudianism in ways relevant to all those concerned with

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3 Born in Paris, Jacques Marie Emile Lacan (1901-1981) belonged to a family of solid Catholic tradition, and was educated at a Jesuit school. He was initially a student of medicine and later excelled in psychiatry. He did his clinical training at various psychiatry institutions and was awarded Ph.D. in 1932 on Paranoid Psychosis: its Relationship to the personality, a study which had a great influence on many of the surrealists. In 1963, he founded L’Ecole Freudienne de Paris (E.F.P.), a school devoted to the training of analysts and the practicing of psychoanalysis according to Lacanian stipulations. Lacan died in Paris on September 9, 1981.

the question of the human subject, its place in society and, above all, its relationship to language4. While concentrating on the psychoanalytical approach, it is presumed that like all forms of literary criticism, this school of criticism can yield useful clues to diverse baffling symbols, actions, and settings in a literary work. It is important to mention here that this approach to literature tended, up to 1950, to psychoanalyze the individual author but after 1950 began to emphasize the ways in which authors create works that appeal to readers’ repressed wishes and fantasies. Consequently, the focus shifted away from the author’s psyche toward the psychology of the reader and the text. Norman Holland’s theories, for example, concerned more with the reader than with the text and in the process helped to establish reader-response criticism. Critics influenced by D.W. Winnicott, an object-relations theorist, have questioned the tendency to see the reader/text as an either/or construct; instead, they have seen reader and text (or audience and play) in terms of a relationship taking place in what Winnicott calls a “transitional” or “potential space” — space in which binary oppositions like real/illusory and objective/subjective have little or

no meaning. Jacques Lacan, another post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorist, focused on language and language-related issues. He also revised Freud’s concept of the Oedipus complex by relating it to the issue of language and argues that the pre-oedipal stage is also a preverbal or “mirror stage,” a stage he associates with the \textit{imaginary order}. He associates the subsequent oedipal stage—which roughly coincides with the child’s entry into language—with what he calls the \textit{symbolic order}, in which words are not the things they stand for but substitutes for those things. The \textit{imaginary order} and the \textit{symbolic order} are two of Lacan’s three orders of subjectivity, the third being the real, which involves intractable and substantial things or states that cannot be imagined, symbolized, or known directly. Lacan’s approach, therefore, takes psychoanalysis as a field that encompasses all human, mental and emotional phenomena and establishes that there is hardly any area where psychoanalysis does not figure and it exists “as the ultimate totality.

\footnote{5 The childhood wish to displace the parent of one’s own sex and take his or her place in the affections of the parent of the opposite sex.}

\footnote{6 The history of Psychoanalysis is the story of Freud’s own life. He first used the term ‘Psychoanalysis’ in his paper ‘Heredity and Aetiology of the Neurosis’ (1896). He claimed to be the only complete psychoanalyst of his day. He states: “Even today, when I’m no longer the only psychoanalyst, I feel myself justified in assuming that no body knows better than I, what Psychoanalysis is ...” In fact, ultimately, we know that he devoted his whole life to the study of complex human psyche.}
of which everything else is a part."\(^7\)

Psychoanalytic Criticism, it is important to point out at the outset, is similar to New Criticism in not concerning itself with "what the author intended" but with what the author \textit{never} intended consciously, but repressed in unconscious material or 'irrelevant texture.' As a popular and pervasive form of criticism after the New Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism emerged as a literary-critical tool in the United States and Europe in the 1930s and 40s and was popularized by such theoreticians as Carl Jung, Norman Holland and Jacques Lacan. New Critics dismissed psychoanalysis — like any other "science" or "pseudo-science" — as one of those extrinsic "sources" for literary interpretation that turned literature into something other than "literature."\(^8\) No doubt there are some drawbacks of Psychoanalytic Criticism — such as, it requires an inordinate amount of theoretical knowledge in addition to a broad literary and historical repertoire, it draws our attention away from what has been written (literature) to the writer and beyond and, worst of all, reduces the complexity of literature to a mass of psycho-sexual evidence that fails to take into account the nuances.


of form or plot or tone— but, like all other critical methods, this criticism at its best entails "close" reading and incorporates nuance. And since no critical method will yield all of what a literary work has to offer, this critical method can hardly be singled out for censure on that score. Besides, psychoanalytic approaches to literature, at least in their earlier forms, were similar to that claimed by the New Critics.

Both inside and outside of France, Lacan is popularly treated as the most important psychoanalyst since Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), a theoretician who reformulated the Freudian concepts, particularly his discussion of unconscious, at a time when psychoanalytic criticism had degenerated into the reductive practice of identifying oedipal scenarios within the text and spotting "phallic symbolism". The concept of the ‘unconscious’ given by Freud and later modified by Lacan made it significant subject of psychoanalysis. According to Freud, the unconscious is a realm of repressed wishes and fantasies and it is also a realm

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9 Lacan, it will be analysed in the thesis, replaced Freudian division of human mind into the id, the ego and the superego by his own trinity: the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Real is the unnameable, the outside of language. The Imaginary is the undifferentiated early state of the child, a fusion of subject and parent, which remains latent in adult life, manifesting when we falsely identify with others. The Symbolic is the demarcated world of the adult with its enforced distinctions and repressions.
without syntax or grammar. Hence, the way we speak of unconscious wishes and desires creates a paradoxical situation or something of a dilemma for the theorist and analyst because to speak of unconscious desire is to render it conscious and the unconscious, by definition, is that which is excluded from and cannot be recalled to consciousness. Since the unconscious wishes and desires cannot be put into language it can safely be argued that Freud excludes the unconscious from language. According to him, we can detect the workings of the unconscious through our anxieties and phobias, but we can also detect its effects through our dreams, jokes, and slip of the tongue. In other words, we can detect the workings of unconscious at precisely those times when our conscious mind is alert and active in repressing unwanted thoughts and desires.

In his early work Lacan focused on this area of Freud’s work and looked closely at those texts of Freud that dealt with questions of language and interpretation: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Lacan sought to tackle the paradox which always confronts psychoanalysis: if we can say that psychoanalysis is the discourse of the unconscious, or a discourse upon the unconscious, it is a discourse that rests upon
something that is always beyond itself. In short, Lacan tries to articulate through the structure of language something that remains beyond language itself: the realm of unconscious desire. His writing is an attempt to force the reader to confront the limits of meaning and understanding and to acknowledge the profoundly disturbing prospect that behind all meaning lies non-meaning.\(^{10}\)

The most vital contribution of Jacques Lacan includes his reformulation of Freud's account of the unconscious using not only the interdisciplinary approach but also linguistic terminology and concepts. Lacan even exploited Roman Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy and related it to Freud's categories of condensation and displacement, respectively. As a result of it, he figures in critical theory, literary studies, twentieth-century French philosophy, and post-structuralism primarily for emphasizing the priority of language over meaning; in other words, for arguing that language forms meaning, it does not give expression to a meaning which is pre-existent. This hypothesis enabled him to induce a shift away from earlier, more clearly Freudian kinds of psychoanalytic literary criticism, which often involved attempts to 'analyse' the text's author or its characters, or

to liken literary devices to kinds of psychic activity described by Freud, such as dream logic or condensation.

Lacan's views on language have made him one of the greatest theoreticians in the contemporary world who, along with Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, revolutionized our understanding, evaluation and appreciation of literature and literary artifacts. Since his theories are difficult to grasp and extend psychoanalytical thought in several directions, he and his concepts have evoked quite a mixed response. On the one hand, he is worshipped—by a group of followers in France, Spain, Italy and other large parts of South America— as a thoroughbred Western Zen master whose thought provoking statements still attract the attention of scholars and psychologists—and, on the other hand, he is dubbed, particularly in the Anglo-American critical circles, as a 'notoriously, wilfully difficult writer'\textsuperscript{11}. Despite these controversial perspectives, Lacan remains one of the most fashionable figures on the French intellectual scene, and one of the most influential in the international dissemination of structuralist and post-structuralist

ideas about language, literature, and the nature of the human subject. In fact, it would be fair to say that there are few twentieth century thinkers who have had such a far-reaching influence on subsequent intellectual life in the humanities as Jacques Lacan who reinterpreted Freud in the light of Structuralist and Post Structuralist theories. Accordingly, the main focus of Lacanian criticism is not upon the unconscious of the character or the author but upon the text itself and the relationship between the text and the reader.

Lacan's ideas that unconscious is structured like a language and the relationship between Symbolic Order, Imaginary Order and Real Order — ideas that have been widely used within literary and cultural studies — opened up a new way of "understanding the play of unconscious desire in the text"\(^\text{12}\). In fact, his thought pervades "the disciplines of literary and film studies, women's studies and social theory and is applied to such diverse fields as education, legal studies and international relations"\(^\text{13}\). The distinctive feature of this thought is its "syncretism" because here "diverse fields such as phenomenology, linguistics, anthropology, and theoretical mathematics mingle with psychoanalysis, creating a complex and


\(^{13}\) *Ibid*, p.1.
evolving amalgam\textsuperscript{14}.

Lacan's theory that the unconscious is structured like a language not only gives language a key role in construction of our picture of the world but also allows the unconscious to enter into that understanding and dissolve essential distinctions between fantasy and reality. Instead of propounding the primordial archetypes like Carl Jung or entities beyond the reach of language like Sigmund Freud, Lacan like other psychologists sees mental illness as a product of early childhood difficulties out of which children progressively gain a self-identity by passing through pre-mirror, mirror and post-mirror stages of development, positing three orders or states of human mental disposition: the imaginary order, the symbolic order, and the real. Lacan even described the unconscious as a kind of discourse, the discourse of the other, and established that the human subject is constituted precisely by the entry into language, and that there is no getting outside language as language is innately figurative, nottransparently referential.

Viewed in this perspective Lacan defines some problematic, and even enigmatic, concepts in addition to the well-known 'real', 'imaginary' and 'symbolic'. These concepts have been widely used

by, the Western writers, scholars and critics for understanding and evaluation of creative works\textsuperscript{15}.

In the post-colonial literature too attempts have been made to apply Lacanian concepts to literary texts in order to reveal the inner or deeper meaning of these works but these attempts have been selective and confined to individual works in the form of essays and write ups. In fact, so far no attempt has been made to analyse the works of a major creative writer such as R.K. Narayan from either a psychoanalytical or Lacanian perspective.

The present thesis divided into five chapters and a conclusion attempts to establish such a task. Chapter I, \textit{Traditional Approaches to R.K. Narayan}, tries to offer a brief resume of critical writing on the works of Narayan. Chapter II, \textit{Lacanian Psychoanalysis Around Realms of Language}, is based on the discussion of some of the crucial concepts in Lacanian Psychoanalysis which provides a theoretical framework for an evaluation and analysis of the novels of Narayan in rest of the three chapters. Though the thesis covers many key terms which run through Lacanian psychoanalysis today, the main focus is on those ideas that have been widely used in literary and cultural studies,

such as the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, the mirror phase, the subject of the unconscious and the unconscious is structured like a language. Chapter III, *The Real in Narayan’s Novels*, Chapter IV, *The Imaginary in Narayan’s Novels* and Chapter V, *The Symbolic in Narayan’s Novels* are based on the analytical study of R. K. Narayan’s novels from these three major Lacanian concepts. While analyzing themes, characters, episodes, images, metaphors and symbols in the novels, it has been attempted to demonstrate that the Lacanian concepts, despite their being unorthodox, for their poststructuralist tinge, prove highly beneficial for understanding and appreciation even of the orthodox or conventional author such as Narayan. Finally, the Conclusion sums up the main arguments of the thesis.