Chapter – 3
Critical Theories of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century

“The richness of any great literary work merits correspondingly rich responses - responses that may be reasoned as well as felt” asserts Wilfred L. Guerin (Preface, x). A work of great art is appreciated from many perspectives as one goes deep into it. A reader enjoys the literary work through various angles by extracting the different planes of meaning and feelings or in other words, through criticism. From literature one derives aesthetic pleasure and more enlightenment dawns when critical techniques are applied to good and imaginative writing. There are various critical tools or approaches or techniques that are indispensable for deep critical reading. The author applies various techniques to make his writing effective and lively to read.

The term "literary techniques" refers to specific aspects of literature, in the sense of its universal function as an art form that expresses ideas through language, which we can recognize, identify, interpret and analyze. Literary techniques collectively comprise the art form’s components—the means authors use to create meaning through language, and that readers use to understand and appreciate their works. They also provide a conceptual framework for comparing individual literary works to others, within and across genres.

"Literary techniques" is a catch-all term that may be only imperfectly distinguished from the term "literary devices". Literary techniques are literary moves a writer might make that are defined not so much by functional or descriptive characteristics as by imitation and repeated use by many authors over time. Instances of literary techniques tend to be harder to identify than instances of devices, and identification of techniques tends to be more dependent upon citing literary precedent;
nevertheless, there is considerable overlapping between the territory of devices and
techniques. Irony, for example, challenges the distinction between a device and a
technique because it refers to a handful of more-or-less easily identifiable literary actions,
but also describes a recognizable but elusively complex attitude toward the subject of a
whole or a part of a work of literature. It is debatable whether literary techniques or
literary devices are the larger category.

These tools are applied in literary criticism. Literary criticism as is said runs
parallel to literature. One of the oldest examples is that of Aristotle, the Greek
philosopher who wrote a major critical treatise called *Poetics* in the fourth century B.C.
He based his theories on ‘Epic and Tragedy’ on the works of Homer and Sophocles.
Likewise there are wide varieties of literary theories ranging from Aristotle (Classicism)
to Alan Sinfield (Cultural Materialism). These literary theories help us gain a cognitive
perspective of the subject.

I.A. Richards, a twentieth century critic opines:

Literary Criticism is the endeavour to discriminate between experiences
and to evaluate them. We cannot do this without some understanding of
the nature of experience, or without theories of valuation and
communication. Such principles as apply in criticism must be taken from
these more fundamental studies. All other critical principles are arbitrary,
and the history of the subject is a record of their obstructive influence

(*Practical Criticism*,4).

Literary criticism is the study, interpretation and evaluation of literature and it is a
practical application of literary theory to literature. Criticism deals directly with a literary
work within a theoretical framework. The word ‘criticism’ derived from the Greek verb
‘kritein’, means to judge, and the one who is skilled in judging is known as ‘kritikos’ in Greek and critic in English. Criticism by definition is the act or art of analyzing and judging the quality of a literary or artistic work. So criticism is the branch of study concerned with defining, classifying, interpreting and evaluating works of literature.

When literary theory has an application orientation it becomes literary criticism. A theory of literature in the sense of general principles, together with a set of terms, distinctions and categories, is applied to identifying and analyzing works of literature. Theory is also the criteria, the standard or norm by which literary works and their writers are evaluated. Thus theory and practice interact with each other. I.A. Richards, a twentieth century critic in his two major books, Principles of Literary Criticism(1924) and Practical Criticism(1929) integrated theory and practice in literary studies and he was an exponent of a method called practical or descriptive criticism. It was a close study of literature that paid great critical attention to all the details of the text. Richards argued, “The two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest are an account of value and an account of communication.” Earlier Richards had been interested in the psychology of reading, and his approach to literature was largely empirical i.e. not theoretical but tending towards actual experience, but his experiment in Cambridge of giving unsigned poems to undergraduate students marked the beginning of practical criticism. A poem or a piece of writing, shorn of its historical context, shorn of its title sometimes, severed of its genetic or umbilical cord, stood all by itself as “words on the printed page” before the student, inviting his uninhibited and unconditional response. Richards found and asserted that “the poems received much more thorough study than, shall we say, most anthology pieces get in the ordinary course…it is this thoroughness, prompted by desire which helped to arrive at some definite expressible opinion” (53).
Likewise there have appeared a large number of innovative literary theories and methods of critical analysis, including revised and amplified versions of the earlier forms of Marxist criticism and Psychoanalytic criticism. These theories have been in vogue since World War I, especially since the 1960s. A table below shows the approximate period of the prevalence of different theories of the 20th Century:

<table>
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<th>Period</th>
<th>Theories</th>
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<tr>
<td>1920s – 1930s</td>
<td>Russian Formalism</td>
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<td>1930s – 1940s</td>
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<td>1940s – 1950s</td>
<td>New Criticism ; (phenomenological Criticism)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Modern forms of feminist criticism; structuralist criticism; stylistics</td>
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<td>1970s</td>
<td>Theory of the anxiety of influence; deconstruction; discourse analysis; various forms of reader-response criticism; reception theory; semiotics; speech-act theory</td>
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<td>1980s</td>
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<td>Darwinian literary studies; Eco criticism; post-colonial studies</td>
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M.H. Abrams lucidly explains in his *Mirror and the Lamp*:

A good critical theory nevertheless has its own kind of validity. The criterion is not the scientific verifiability of its single propositions, but the scope, precision, and coherence of the insights that it yields into the properties of single works of art and the adequacy with which it accounts for diverse kinds of art. Such a criterion will, of course, justify not one, but a number of valid theories, all in their several ways self-sufficient, applicable, and relative to the range of aesthetic phenomena; but this diversity is not to be deplored (4-5).
M. H. Abrams has made a useful and effective distinction between different kinds of criticism based on the kind of importance we give to what he called the ‘coordinates’ of a given work of art. His *Mirror and the Lamp* introduces a clear picture of the nature and function of criticism. He describes four kinds of criticism:

(i) Mimetic Criticism  
(ii) Pragmatic Criticism  
(iii) Expressive Criticism  
(iv) Objective Criticism

The several strands of modern and post-modern criticism can be related to one or other of the above branches. Thus if the concept of the autonomous nature of work of art led to Formalism of different kinds, Structuralism with its emphasis on ‘codes’ and strategies employed in the text, is only a development of pragmatic criticism.

There are myriad literary theories which are an unavoidable part of studying literature and criticism, but here only a brief account of some of the major twentieth century literary theories has been given.

**Formalism**

Formalism also known as Russian Formalism, is a type of literary theory and analysis which originated in former Soviet Union in the 1920s. This theory has two focus points. One, the Moscow Linguistic Circle, founded in 1915 by Roman Jakobson, was composed primarily of linguists, such as Petr Bogatyrev and Grigorii Vinokur, who were developing new approaches to the study of language and regarded poetics as part of linguistics. The other, the Petrograd OPOJAZ (acronym for the Formalists’ Society for the Study of Poetic Language, formed in 1916 by Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, and others), was composed mainly of literary historians, who viewed literature as a unique form of verbal art that had to be studied on its own, without relying too heavily on
linguists. The other leading linguistic theoreticians of this movement were Jan
Mukarovsky and Rene Wellek.

Roman Jakobson contributed two main ideas to modern literary theory. One
resulted from his attempt to define in linguistic terms what makes a verbal message a
work of art, that is, its ‘literariness’ (literaturnost). Jakobson wrote in 1921: “The object
of study in literary science is not literature but literariness, that is, what makes a given
work a literary work” (172).

Jan Mukarovsky viewed a work of art as a system of signs, a sign in itself, which
in contrast to other signs (e.g. the other uses of language) does not lie on some final,
unambiguous relationship to reality. Poetic language i.e. literary language utilizes its
material primarily for the purpose of self-directedness, and not for the purpose of
providing referential information; it calls attention to itself; it is self-referential and
autonomous. Metalanguage is the language used to talk about language, the language of
literature. Victor Shklovsky made major contributions in this regard. He explained that
ordinary language over a period of time became smooth, unconscious or transparent but a
work of literature usually defamiliarizes language by a process of “making strange” and
thus disrupts the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse and renews the reader’s lost
capacity for fresh sensation.

According to Shklovsky, “Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object:
the object is not important.” What distinguishes a literary work from non-literary works is
not the subject matter or content but the mode of presentation.

New Criticism

American New Criticism flourished from the late 1930s to the 1950s. Although it
developed independently, it is sometimes called “formalist” because like European
formalism, it stresses the analysis of the literary work as a self-sufficient entity,
independent of actualities of the author and the “external” world. The major figures of New Criticism are T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, William Empson, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and a few others.

The term “The New Criticism” attained wide circulation after Ransom used it for a book titled *The New Criticism* in 1941. The term is a misnomer for it is not new; but the continuation of tradition and is a further extension of seminal ideas. This movement derived in considerable part from elements in I.A. Richards’ *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) and from the critical essays of T.S. Eliot.

New Criticism opposed a prevailing interest of scholars, critics and teachers of the 1920s in the biographies of the author, in the social context of literature and in literary history. Terry Eagleton views:

> If the poem was really to become an object in itself, New Criticism had to sever it from both author and reader. I. A. Richards had naively assumed that the poem was no more than a transparent medium through which we could observe the poet’s psychological processes: reading was just a matter of recreating in our own mind the mental condition of the author (*Literary Theory: Introduction*, 41).

Thus New Criticism focuses on the literary work in isolation from its attendant circumstances and effects or historical position of a work. It considers in detail the work itself as an independent entity. Due to this reason, New Criticism is often classified as a type of critical *formalism*.

The principles of New Criticism are the explicative procedure used to analyze the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech and symbols. It reveals the power of a literary work through the method of *close reading*: the detailed analysis of the complex inter-relationships and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and
figurative components within a work. Close attention is paid to the individual words, theme, imagery, metaphor, rhythm, metre and other features. It is a strict “word-on the page” approach to a literary text.

**Structuralism**

Structuralism has been applied to linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, folklore, mythology and Biblical studies, in fact, to all social and cultural phenomena. Its attractions are due to its scientific and objective approach. It analyzes the narrative material by examining the underlying permanent structure. For instance, a literary critic applying a structuralist literary theory might say that the authors of modern Romance do not write anything really new because their work has the same structure as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. In all these texts, a girl and a boy fall in love. Structuralist literary criticism states that the “novelty value of a literary text” can lie only in new structures rather than in the specifics of character development and voice in which that structure is expressed.

Structuralism flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. It sought to answer questions like: how does a poem generate meaning? Or, how does a narrative work? This form of criticism originated from the work of the early twentieth century French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure was a key figure in the development of modern approaches to language study. In the nineteenth century, linguistic scholars had mainly been interested in historical aspects of language such as working out the historical development of languages and connections between them and speculating about the origins of language itself, but Saussure called for a scientific study of language rather than a historical one.

Structure is the design or arrangement of the parts of a work of literature to form a unified whole; the planned framework or “architecture” of a literary work. In Narrative
Fiction, the arrangement of events from first to last-beginning, middle, end - is a matter of structure. Structure involves both mechanical and logical arrangement. A play, for instance, is structured mechanically as a sequence of acts and scenes; it is structured logically as a movement through Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Denouement.

In Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) it is explained that Structuralism is founded on the basic concept of the sign. Every linguistic sign has two parts: the signifier (*word*) and the signified (*concept*) that the signifier stands for. CAT is the sign made up of the sound pattern/kaet/ and a concept of the small furry animal it refers to. Saussurean linguistics has following fundamental assumptions:

1. **Arbitrariness:** The meanings given to words are entirely *arbitrary*. There is no inherent or “natural” connection between the word and the meaning. The language is a system in itself. To phrase it in its proper terminology, the relation between the signifier and signified is purely arbitrary.

2. **Relational:** No word has its meaning in isolation. It possesses meaning through its difference from other words in the organizational chain.

3. **Systematic:** It applies to the study of literature as whole, as a meaning system. As literature is a system, no work of literature is an autonomous whole; similarly literature itself is not autonomous but is part of the larger structures of the signification of the culture.

Structuralism in general, as Terry Eagleton has put it,

is an attempt to apply this linguistic theory to objects and activities other than language itself. You can view a myth, wrestling match, system of tribal kinship, restaurant menu or oil painting as a system of signs, and a structuralist analysis will try to isolate the underlying set of laws by which
these signs are combined into meanings. It will largely ignore what the
signs actually ‘say’, and concentrate instead on their internal relations to
one another (Literary Theory: An Introduction, 84).

Although Formalism is not directly associated with Structuralism, but Saussure’s
views attracted the Russian Formalists. Russian Formalism views literary texts
‘structurally’, and suspends attention to the referent to examine the sign itself. It was the
linguist Roman Jakobson who worked out the connection between Formalism and
modern day Structuralism. Jakobson explained that language besides showing
‘literariness’ also gave the identification of the two main rhetorical figures, metaphor and
metonymy as models for two fundamental ways of organizing discourse: selection and
combination.

Narratology

The ‘point of view’ is a literary device that depicts the manner in which a story is
narrated or depicted and who it is that tells the story and determines the angle and
perception of the story unfolding, and thus influences the tone in which the story takes
place. The point of view is instrumental in manipulating the reader’s understanding of the
narrative. In a way, the point of view allows the reader access into the greater reaches of
the story. The most common point of view techniques are the first person, wherein the
story is told by the narrator from his or her standpoint and the third person wherein the
narrator does not figure in the events of the story and tells the story by referring to all
characters and places in the third person with third person pronouns and proper nouns.

Narratology concerns with the general theory and practice of narrative of all
literary forms. It deals especially with the types of the narrators, the identification of
structural elements and their diverse modes of combination, recurrent narrative devices
and the analysis of the mode in which the work is narrated or told and point of view. The
mode of narration goes back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the fourth century and which includes in present time the works of Russian Formalism especially Vladimir Propp’s *The Morphology of the Folklore*, first published in Russia in 1928. Propp’s work analyzes the morphs or forms of structure and plot formations of the tales. Peter Barry who exemplifies meals in a restaurant and says that the actual meals can be termed as descriptions and the way they are served with garnishing as narratives. In the same way a story is actual sequence of events or a descriptive thing while the plot is edited, packaged and presented item just like the meal as narrative. He defines narratology:

Narratology, then is not reading and interpretation of *individual* stories, but the attempt to study the nature of ‘story’ itself, as a concept and as a cultural practice. Indeed, that distinction between the *actual* meal – cod and chips – and the *narrative account* of it – the ‘succulent, fresh-caught cod’ – is much the same as the narratologist’s basic distinction between ‘story’ and ‘plot’. The ‘story’ is the actual sequence of events as they happen, whereas the ‘plot’ is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented in what we recognize as a narrative (*Beginning Theory*, 215).

**Post structuralism**

Post structuralism emerged in France in the late 1960s. It deals with language and other signifying systems in an innovative way. The two major figures most closely associated with this emergence are Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Jacques Derrida’s lecture at the 1966 conference at John Hopkins’s university is considered as a manifesto against Structuralism.

The term ‘post structuralism’ is an umbrella term that includes several approaches to literary criticism. Post structuralism ruptures the bond inherent in the signifier and the
signified whereas structuralism only created a wedge, between the sign and the referent. Eagleton in this reference explains with the example that ‘cat’ may mean a furry four-legged creature, a malicious person, a knotted whip, an American, a horizontal beam for raising a ship’s anchor, a six-legged tripod, a short tapered stick and so on. But even when it just means a furry four-legged animal, this meaning will never quite stay the same from context to context: the signified will be altered by the various chains of signifiers in which it is entangled (112).

Thus Saussure’s fundamental distinction between signifier and signified is at the heart of the instability. Without realizing it, Saussure, in making the distinction, exposed no coherences between signs but an inherent incoherence. Post structuralism pursues further the Saussurean perception that in language there are only differences without positive terms and shows that the signifier and signified are, as it were, not only oppositional but plural, pulling against each other, and by so doing creating numerous deferments of meaning, apparently endless criss-crossing patterns and sequences of meaning.

In post structuralism theory, Roland Barthes is of particular importance because he bridges the structuralism and post structuralism movements. In his book *Elements of Semiology* (1967) he proposed that structuralism is capable of an explanation of any sign system of any culture i.e. all system of significance, but he also perceives that such an explanation necessitates a theory of meaning explanation. This gives rise to the idea of a ‘metalanguage’ which is used to describe/explain/interpret a ‘first-order’ language.

**Deconstruction**

Deconstruction is an applied post structuralism. This is a process in which a post structuralist literary critic engages himself in the task of ‘deconstructing’ the text. It is often referred to as ‘reading against the grain’.
The originator of deconstruction is Jacques Derrida. All metaphysicians from Plato to Heidegger have conceived and built their thought systems by installing hierarchies of orders or subordination which are logically opposed and ignore or marginalize the alternative forms of that opposition.

Deconstruction can almost be characterized as the opposite of everything for which formalist criticism stands. Deconstruction begins with the assumption that the world is unknowable and that language is unstable, elusive, and unfaithful. Language is all of these things because meaning is largely generated by opposition: “Hot” means something in opposition to “cold” but a hot day may be 90 degrees whereas a hot oven is at least 400 degrees; and a “hot item” may be of any temperature. Deconstructionists seek to show that a literary work (usually called “a text” or “a discourse”) inevitably is self-contradictory.

A simpler definition of deconstruction is given by Barbara Johnson:

Deconstruction is not synonymous with ‘destruction’. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word ‘analysis’, which etymologically means ‘to undo’… The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text. (5)

To deconstruct is to undo something, not destroying but destabilizing constantly. Deconstruction thus is an attempt to open any text (literary, philosophical or historical) to a range of meanings and interpretations. Its method is usually to take binary oppositions within a text; the rigidly defined pairs of opposites like good/evil or male/female and show that they are not as clear-cut or as stable as it first seems, that the two opposed concepts are in fact fluid, and to use this new found ambiguity is to show that the text’s
meaning is also unstable. Derrida’s essay *Difference* explains it is ‘difference’ which occurs during such a reading.

Derrida’s greatest supporters have been Paul de Mann, Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom who became synonymous with a deconstructive practice in the 1970s.

**Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Psychoanalytic criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in an indirect and fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author. It argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, and the literary work is a manifestation of the author’s own neuroses.

Psychoanalytic criticism originated in the work of Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who pioneered the technique of psychoanalysis. Freud developed the procedure for the analysis and therapy of neuroses and applied it in warfare, mythology and religion as well as literature and other arts. Freud proposes that literature and the other arts, like dreams and neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or fantasized, fulfillment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety. Freud developed mechanically predictable theories, the most celebrated and fundamental one is the Oedipus complex.

According to Freud the forbidden, mainly sexual (“libidinal”) wishes come into conflict with the “censor” (the internalized representative within each individual of a society’s standards of morality and propriety) and are repressed by the censor into the unconscious realm of the artist’s mind, but are permitted to achieve a fantasized satisfaction in distorted forms that serve to disguise their real motives and objects from the conscious mind.
The chief mechanisms that effect the disguises of unconscious wishes are "condensation" - the omission of parts of the unconscious material and the fusion of several unconscious elements into a single entity; 'displacement' that is the substitution for an unconscious object of desire by one that is acceptable to the conscious mind; and "symbolism" that means the representation of repressed, mainly sexual objects of desire by non-sexual objects.

Freud’s main discovery was the role of the unconscious in human lives. Freud suggested a three part model of the psyche:

1. The ego which is rational, logical, mostly conscious part of the mind regulates id and comes to terms with super ego and is driven by reality principle.
2. The super ego which is an internal censor but is derived from social control and driven to fulfill demands of morality principle, and
3. The id which is irrational, instinctual, vital, unconscious (contains our secret desires, darkest wishes, intense fear) and is driven to fulfill wishes of pleasure principle.

The ego is said to be the battleground for forces of the super ego and the id.

Psychoanalytic criticism also finds its earliest expression in Freud’s readings of *Hamlet* (1899) and Dostoevsky (1908). For many decades after Freud, his followers like Ernest Jones and Marie Bonaparte followed Freudian theory to read texts. In the 1960s, the advent of the French thinker Jacques Lacan changed psychoanalysis irrevocably. Lacan, while advocating a “return to Freud” recast Freudian theory in a linguistic framework influenced by Saussure and Emile Benveniste. Other Critics such as Harold Bloom, Lionel Trilling and Norman Holland have also adopted Freud at various stages in their work.
Reader-response criticism

Reader-response criticism does not designate any one critical theory, but rather focuses on the process of reading a literary text that is shared by many of the critical modes. This type of criticism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in America and Germany, in work by Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, and others. Louise Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration (1938)* is often recognized as the pioneer in the approach.

Reader-response criticism explicitly emphasizes the reader’s role in creating the meaning and experience of a literary work. It focuses on the responses of readers, either the individual reader or readers belonging to specific categories, such as class, gender and ethnicity. This theory recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts “real existence” to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. It stands in total opposition to the theories of formalism and the New Criticism, in which the reader’s role in re-creating literary works is ignored.

The reader-response critics agree that the meanings of a text are the “production” or “creation” of the individual reader, hence that there is no one “correct” meaning for all readers either of the linguistic parts or of the artistic whole of a text.

The German critic Wolfgang Iser in his work, *The Act of Reading* tells the phenomenological analysis of the reading. In Iser’s view the literary text, as a product of the writer’s intentional acts, in part controls the reader’s responses, but always contains a number of “gaps” or “indeterminate elements”. These the reader must fill in by a creative participation with what is given in the text before him. The experience of reading is an evolving process of anticipation, frustration, retrospection, reconstruction and satisfaction. Iser distinguishes between the implied reader who is expected to respond in
specific ways to the “response-inviting structures” of the text, and the “actual reader”, whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

French Structuralist Jonathan Culler said in *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), that it “it is essentially a theory of reading” which aims to “specify how we go about making sense of texts” (128). Culler stresses that literary conventions, codes and rules which, having been assimilated by competent readers, serve to structure their reader experience and produce different interpretations.

Stanley Fish is the proponent of what he calls affective stylistics. According to Fish the activity of reading converts the spatial sequence of the print on a page into a temporal flow of experience in a reader. The reader makes sense of what he has so far read by anticipating what is still to come.

Reader-response criticism does not imply some personal “reaction”. In this type of criticism, one should concentrate on the effect of texts or the reactions of groups of readers, or what Fish calls “interpretive communities” which may or may not be historically “real”.

**Modernism and Post modernism**

Generally called a movement, modernism is an international body of literature characterized by a new self-consciousness about modernity and by radical formal experimentation. Several literary movements and styles were fostered within modernism, which flourished from around 1890 until 1940. There was also a period of so-called ‘high modernism’, 1920-25.

The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially after World War I (1914-18).
Generally, modernists were driven by the belief that the assurances once provided by religion, politics or society no longer sufficed. This belief intensified after World War I, when it seemed that history itself was coming to an end and that modern life was horrific, chaotic and ultimately futile. Some modernists, notably T.S. Eliot expressed a deep sense of loss and despair. The year 1922 was signalized by the appearance of such monuments of modernist innovation as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*; Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* as well as many other experimental works of literature.

Many other modernists shared an ambitious, inspirational belief in the role and place of the artist in contemporary life, believing that art had replaced religion in providing coherence, guidance and insight into the human condition. For some writers this meant a fresh sense of the possibilities of ancient myths and a revaluation of the contemporary meanings of myth was typical of high modernism.

The modernist period also saw a radical experimentation in literary form and expression. Many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases of western art and culture in general. In part this developed in response to new insights provided by recently established disciplines such as psychology. This was true of the Stream of Consciousness technique, and in many respects modernist prose narrative begins with the complex later. Henry James Experimentation was also partly a response to the new forms of expression that were developing in painting, sculpture and music; another of modernism’s characterizing features was the intense interaction between literature and the other arts. Also most modernists believed that literature should challenge and unsettle readers, and much modernist work may be demanding and difficult, alluding to a wide range of learning. In other words the phenomenon called *avant-garde*, a term used for French military metaphor meaning...
“advance-guard,” is a prominent feature of modernism which is a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertake, in Ezra Pound’s phrase to “make it new.”

Major figures of modernism who radically redefined poetry and fiction include Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka and William Faulkner.

**Post modernism**

The term post modernism is often applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45) when the effects on western morale of the First World War were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of over-population.

The term post modernism was popularized in literary criticism during the 1960s and 70s by critics like Ihab Hassan, Irving Howe, Leslie Fiedler and others. The first usage of the term is attributed to Charles Jencks in 1947. The term was used in literary criticism to describe the complex work of authors like Donald Barthelme, John Barth and Samuel Beckett.

Post modernism borrows from modernism disillusionment with the givens of society; a penchant for irony; the self-conscious “play” within the work of art; fragmentation and ambiguity, and a destructured, decentered, dehumanized subject.

Modernism presented a fragmented view of human history (as in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*), and this fragmentation was seen as tragic. Despite their pessimism, modernist works still hope that art may be able to provide the unity, coherence and meaning that has been lost in most of modern life, as the church and nation have failed to do so. In contrast, post modernism not only does not mourn the loss of meanings, but celebrates the activity
of fragmentation. Whereas modernism still seeks a rational meaning in a work of art, postmodernism explores the provisionality and irrationality of art.

**Surrealism**

Surrealism was launched as a concerted artistic movement in France by Andre Breton’s *Manifesto on Surrealism* (1924). It was a successor to the brief movement known as Dadaism which emerged in 1916 out of disgust with the brutality and destructiveness of First World War.

The expressed aim of surrealism was a revolt against all restraints on free creativity, including logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms, and all control over the artistic process by forethought and intention. To ensure the unhampered operation of the “deep mind” which they regarded as the only source of valid knowledge as well as art, surrealists turned to automatic writing (writing delivered over to the promptings of the unconscious mind) and to exploiting the material of dreams of states of mind between sleep and waking and of natural or drug-induced hallucinations.

Surrealism was a revolutionary movement in painting, sculpture and the other arts, such as literature. The influence, direct or indirect, of surrealist innovations can be found in many modern writers of prose and verse who have broken with conventional modes of artistic organization. They experiment with free association, broken syntax, non-logical and non-chronological order, dreamlike and nightmarish sequences, and juxtaposition of bizarre, shocking or seemingly unrelated images.

Surrealistic effects can be found in a wide range of writings from the poetry of Dylan Thomas to the flights of fantasy, hallucinative writing, inconsequence, and African American humor in the novels of Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon and Ralph Ellison.

**Realism and Naturalism**
Realism is a style of writing, usually prose, in which surface appearance is presented in an unembellished way. Realism was used as a literary term in France where it was applied to literary and visual forms which aim for the accurate reproduction of the world as it is. The realist writer seeks to represent experiences that are usual or typical rather than extraordinary or exotic. Realist fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. Literary realism emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Daniel Defoe (1660-1737) is commonly called a realist because of his factual description and narration. Realism is also used in modern literature in opposition to what is regarded as sentimentalism, the disposition to represent feelings.

Naturalism is a late nineteenth century form of realism associated with the French novelist, Emile Zola. Naturalism is more than a literary technique. For the naturalist it is the duty of the writer to present to the reader reality without illusion, to offer a scientific, detached view of it rather than to adorn or mislead or simply to please the reader. The writer is also seen to have a diagnostic function, scrutinizing the ills of society and the scientific element of naturalism has its origin in the theories of Darwin and after him in Marx, in the development of the social sciences during the nineteenth century.

American naturalism developed broadly in two directions, one examines the social and political dynamics of American urban life and the other examines the biological aspects of deterministic thought. Notable naturalists are Frank Norris, Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser.

**Individualism**

The term “Individualism” was first used by Alexis De Tocqueville (1805-59). Individualism refers to humanistic philosophy that is considered central to American thought and attitudes. Individualism is a belief in the rights of the individual and in the desirability of encouraging self-interest as a means of organizing society. It asserts that
the state should not interfere in the individual’s autonomous conduct in economic, religious and moral terms and that the state’s main function is to support the emergence and development of the individual. Its fullest expression can be seen in Puritanism legacy, Ball of Rights, and Self-Reliance.

Expressionism

Expressionism originated in Germany, and is a movement affecting painting and literature which was at its peak between 1910 and 1925. Its chief precursors were artists and writers who had in various ways departed from realistic depictions of life and the world. They incorporated in their art visionary or powerfully emotional states of mind that are expressed and transmitted by means of distorted representations of the outer world. For instance, “childhood” in painting, might be shown, not through a conventional representational picture of children at play or at school, but by seemingly unarticulated and exaggerated physical details that suggest “childhood” or convey the impression that the artist has of the concept “child”.

Expressionism was strongest in the theater in the 1920s, and its entry into other literary forms was probably through the stage. The German dramatists Franc Wedekind, Ernst Toner and Czech Karol Capek were the major figures in European expressionist drama which flourished in the 1920s. It was marked by unreal atmosphere, nightmarish action, distortion and oversimplified fiction. In general Expressionists rejected the imitation of external reality in order to express either a private, inner vision or a wider political one of a world, often depicted as bizarre and violent. In American drama, some of Eugene O’Neill’s plays particularly The Emperor Jones (1920), The Hairy Ape (1922) and The Great God Brown (1926), with the use of masks, was influenced by expressionism in their departure from certain realistic conventions of drama.
In the novel the presentation of the outer world as it expresses itself in the impressions of moods of a character is a widely used device. The most famous extended example is Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, although the expressionistic intent and method are often apparent in works using Stream of Consciousness as witnessed in the “Circe” episode in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Expressionism had begun to flag by 1925 and was finally suppressed in Germany by the Nazis in the early 1930s, but it continued to exert influence on English and American as well as European art and literature.

**Feminist Criticism**

In the world social structure, women have been put in the lower stratum. They have been derided and denied authority. Marginalized from enjoying equal status and human rights, and from sharing their views, they have always been confined to the domestic world and considered as the weaker sex. Men have always expected the woman to be inferior and subordinate. The woman in every literature is portrayed as a passive creature and a carnal thing to be possessed and conquered by men. Simone De Beauvoir, an existentialist and a critic, in her essay, “The Second Sex” explains that the ideal of an average Western man wants a woman to be one:

who freely accepts his domination, who does not accept his ideas without discussion, but with, but who yields to his arguments, who resists him intelligently and ends by being convinced. The greater his pride, the more dangerous he likes his adventures to be: it is much more splendid to conquer Pentheselia than to marry a yielding Cinderella (*The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, 258).

Such treatment in patriarchal society has evoked women’s responses to their situations as writers and reader to what is called Feminist Literary Criticism. It reads
literary texts for the way the woman is represented and argues that the literary text masks socio-political oppression of women by justifying this oppression and naturalizing it. In A Room of One’s Own (1929), Virginia Woolf argues:

Suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers; how few parts in the plays of Shakespeare could be allotted to them; how literature would suffer! We might perhaps have most of Othello; and a good deal of Antony; but no Caesar, no Brutus, no Hamlet, no Lear, no Jaques- literature would be incredibly impoverished, as indeed literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women. Married against their will, kept in one room, and to occupation, how could a dramatist give a full or interesting or truthful account of them?

(The New Feminist Criticism, 131)

The feminist critics draw attention to the ways the male authors have exploited women in their portrayal. Feminist criticism dates as far back as Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) in which Wollstonecraft meditates at length on the social and cultural damage caused by the wrong education given to young girls and she gives instances of works like Milton’s Paradise Lost where the misogynistic images of women are perpetuated. She writes:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection
of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives (The New Feminist Criticism, 131).

Thus in the early twentieth century, Olive Schreiner, Virginia Woolf and later Simon De Beauvoir have written on the gender question from the perspective of and oriented towards issues like education, marriage, economics, sexuality and morals. This criticism did not gain widespread recognition as a theoretical political movement until the 1960s and 1970s and then appeared the popular works of critics like Kate Millet’s Sexual Politics (1969), Juliet Mitchell’s Woman’s Estate (1971), Eli Zaretsky’s Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life (1976), Elaine Showalter’s The New Feminist (1985) and others.

The study of different approaches to literary and critical theories propels a reader to develop better and clear understanding of any literary work. Application of the critical theories to piece of literature clears off the ambiguity and indistinctness in grasping the work. The critical theories offer insight and wider perspectives of literature and facilitate to develop new ideas. Moreover the critical theories work as an excellent device of technical language which unties the complexity of artistic writing thereby opening new avenues for exhaustive study and full pleasure. Critical theories are today taken as new canon in understanding the multiple perspectives of literature. They are the windows through which one can peep into the history, culture and the biography of the author and the milieu of his writings.