Chapter I:

**Objects and their valence in critical theory**

There have been many concepts about how literature has been created but it has been accepted that the act of imitation has been integral to it. Aristotle, for example, has stated in his *Poetics* that “[i]mitation is natural to man from childhood . . . he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation . . . though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art . . .”¹ Thus the objects visible in the real world have provided the artist with impetus to form his works of art. Though opinions regarding the creative process have often varied, objects have always remained central to this creative process. Poetry is subjected to certain limitations due to its form though there are several references to objects that set the mood in the Anglo-Saxon poems; in *Beowulf* references to rings and rewards, wine cups and round tables help in preparing a somber setting. With the advent of drama, the importance of objects increased as this form required a creation of a detailed set-up. The dagger in *Macbeth* is one such object that acquires different connotations; it foretells the future when Macbeth hallucinates about its mutating nature:

I see thee still;

And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,

Which was not so before. (II, i, l. 45-47)
The clear conscience of Macbeth is gradually vitiated like the imaginary weapon that must be planted in reality to prove his innocence as Lady Macbeth instructs:

Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there: go, carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood. (II, ii, 1.47-49)

Here a commonplace object like the dagger serves a dual purpose – it is instrumental in bringing out the inner workings of the evil minds and at the same time show the surfacing of doubts in the minds of the onlookers, thereby revealing two perspectives.

As drama chose for its subject matter the common man and dissociated itself from the aristocracy objects came to be more focused upon. With the advent of a new literary form – the novel, the lives of common people were further enquired into. As these novels described the lives of the protagonists in details the settings became integral to the craft. Objects became essential in depicting the characters as their background became important in delineating the inner workings of these characters. The Reddleman’s van in The Return of the Native and the succour it provides to Thomasin when she comes without getting married to Wildeve is an example. The cart itself is invested with the protective attitude of Diggory Venn and the inanimate object seems to be infused with the affability of the young and caring Reddleman.

It is, however, surprising to note that critics have paid scant attention to the valence of objects in literary works. It required T. S. Eliot to propound his theory of ‘objective correlative’ to draw our attention towards the importance of inanimate objects in the formation of the predominant atmosphere of a literary work. Frank Kermode, in his introduction to the selected prose of T. S. Eliot, informs us that perhaps this expression
was first used by Washington Allston in the middle of the 19th century. He further comments that that the expression may have been generated from a “remote memory” of Santayana’s “object correlative” (Kermode). Carrying these traditions behind him, Eliot gives expression to his famous theory of ‘objective correlative’ in the following manner:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by an ‘objective correlative’ in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (Eliot 100 italics mine).

The theory leads to the concept of impersonality in poetry – how the poet must dissociate himself from the work of art which is the final product of his creative process. We can refer back to Frank Kermode in this regard: “. . . what the object is correlative with is the emotion of the poet; and this correlation was, in Eliot’s own opinion, the least interesting thing about it to anybody except the poet himself” (16). For though every poet begins composing from his own emotions, his struggle must be “to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal” (17). The poem that goes through this process is enthroned in the tradition constructed by Eliot. The objectivity of the poem becomes the “measure of the poet’s success” (17). This signifies a surrender to tradition by the poet. This establishment of the impersonal theory has another trajectory too, that is, the importance of the object in the critic’s vision. The object gathers a life of its own, so to say, as it is vested with the power to arouse adequate emotions in the reader thereby alienating the author from the
work of art and giving the latter a separate and independent identity of its own. As George Williamson says, “[i]n this correlative function the objects become symbols or acquire meanings beyond their usual ones” (35). Therefore, the proper objective correlative becomes “the most effective mask of its relation to the originating emotion” (Kermode 17).

T. S. Eliot stresses on the proper amalgamation of disparate experiences that result in the creation of new possibilities. However, the objects assume importance not for their own sake but by virtue of their association with corresponding feelings in the poet; “their union is established not by the intensity of the feelings themselves but by the emotional compulsion which brings them together, by the degree to which one feeling modifies another” (Williamson 36). Eliot illustrates this happy union through the example of the nightingale generating various feelings in the odes of Keats. The ordinary man has chaotic and fragmented experiences but the poet’s mind has the ability to combine different and disparate experiences to produce striking poetry.

One cannot help noticing the importance Eliot attaches to ‘clear visual images’ in poetry and how this is related to the theory of ‘objective correlative’. When Eliot stresses on the use of ‘a set of objects’ which correspond to a particular emotion we become aware that these objects have to be the adequate external counterpart to any emotion, the tools through which emotion is externalized. Here Eliot’s fascination with the dramatic element in poetry is put forward as these objects give an impression of actual life. Therefore, it would not be wrong to suggest that in this theory the concrete images of objects would represent a concrete external to the emotion as they appeal to our senses.
In the Introduction to *The Sacred Wood* Eliot says: “We can only say that a poem, in some sense, has its own life, that its parts form something quite different from a body of neatly ordered biographical data, that the feeling, or emotion or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet” (Eliot x). In order to endow the poem with a life of its own the artist populates it with not only his emotions but also several objects that provide a particular background – objects which acquire importance in the creation of the atmosphere as they are integral to the formation of the particular set-up. Thus the expression “a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire” brings out clearly the self assurance of the moneyed class through the mention of the ease with which sits the “silken hat”. An apparently innocuous object here reflects not only the sure complacency of the bourgeois philistine but also the abhorrence felt by the cultured and refined Bloomsbury man. Again the expression “broken fingernails of dirty hands” generate in the reader an emotion of disgust and revulsion.

In support of his theory Eliot himself cites the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth* which is replete with a set of sensory perceptions instead of the delineation of the feelings of Lady Macbeth. The various objects mentioned, such as candles or perfumes, allow a glimpse into the inner turmoil in Lady Macbeth’s mind, a mind that is racked by guilt and terror at the loss of self:

Here’s the smell of the blood still: all the
Perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand (V, i, l.48-49).

This instigates Eliot to theorize that “[t]he artistic ‘inevitability’ lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion” (101). Thus Eliot advocates a happy amalgamation of auditory, tactile and visual imaginations and elsewhere he has not
stopped short of censuring Milton and even Joyce for concealing a defective vision under the grandeur and polish of their literature. It is probable that Eliot developed his theory of objective correlative to vent his feeling about the lack of visual imagination in many great poets which resulted in the weakening of the meanings of their poems.

We may now proceed to analyze a poem by T.S. Eliot to see how he makes use of the theory of ‘objective correlative’ in his own creations. In this respect the observations made by F.O Mathiessen are extremely important as he points out that “Eliot’s observations are not primarily of physical objects; his most sustained analysis is states of mind and emotion” (58). To Eliot poetry acquires permanence only when the thoughts and feelings are externalized through either corresponding human actions or objects which can be related to those emotions. The emotions themselves are not of prime importance but the formation of a particular pattern through these emotions generates the value.

*Preludes* is one poem where Eliot makes use of various objects for an evocation of contemporary life with its atmosphere of depression and decay as through various objective images the ugliness and the squalor of modern city life is depicted. To his utter dismay the modern life unfolds itself not only as materialistic but also as decayed and spiritually barren. Though written over a timeframe of about a year, the four units of *Preludes* present before us the monotonous and squalid existence of the modern world. The first object that captures our attention is the smell emitting steak that is the food for the hungry soul returning home from work suggesting succor for the tired workman. But immediate references to the “grimy scraps of withered leaves” and “newspapers from vacant lots” signify the absence of hope and the overbearing despair that weigh down the
inhabitants of this sordid modern world. The beginning of the second Prelude – “The morning comes to consciousness” shows Eliot’s belief in the fact that the objects of perception can never be totally separated from the mind that perceives them. Therefore, though the poem appears to be a recording of the “imagistic representations” of modern city life without any elaborations it is actually “difficult to separate the objects of perception from the perceiving consciousness” (Jain 64). All the objects that are perceived are permeated with the emotions of the observer. It is the observer who is affected by the staid monotonous existence in a city – an existence that perceives all hands raising dingy shades and engaging in boring recurrent activities.

The third Prelude presents a clearer distinction between the consciousness that perceives and the perceived object. The objects participate in an example of dedoublement when the mind contemplates its own workings and projects them through the woman who “curled the papers” from her hair in despairing regularity. A similar fragmentation may be noticed in the distinction between the observer’s vision of the street and the street itself. The fourth Prelude presents another instance of dedoublement where the soul of the observer is provided with individual identity that suffers as it is stretched across the skies and the street. Here the soul is invested with certain attributes that are shared with the trampled street and it is witness to “certain certainties” such as the stuffing of pipes and reading evening newspapers. The poem thus embodies the yearning of the mind to perceive something beyond the common façade of objects – something deeper than the apparent significances of the commonplace objects of everyday city life.
While analyzing Eliot’s poems for his use of the theory of ‘objective correlative’ we are reminded of Ezra Pound who defined the nature of image in such a manner that emphasizes the proper amalgamation of sense and thought as he advocated the reflection of the idea in the image. Image to Pound was that “which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (Mathiessen 61). This definition lends itself to the concept of ‘objective correlative’ and as Mathiessen comments, “would certainly apply directly to what Eliot was trying to do, for instance in such a line as ‘I have measured out my life with coffee spoons’” in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (61). In this unfruitful life Prufrock attempts a last reclamation of his self when he wants to defy the dictates of the age by wearing “the bottoms of [his] trousers rolled” as opposed to the established norms which he sincerely followed before:

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin.

The apparently insignificant change of dress acquires a momentous significance for Prufrock as he musters up courage to overcome his vacillation about ascending or descending the stairs. This act becomes important as in Eliot the stairs embody the effort required to attain the unattainable. Eliot, thus, depends on a set of objects with a “kind of hard precision” to combine together disparate and various associations (Mathiessen 62).

Just as Eliot has expressed his opinions about the importance of objects in the creative process, Roland Barthes has provided an insight into the very nature of objects using the tool of semiology. In his chapter on the Semantics of the Object Barthes has drawn our attention to the fact that linguistics has engaged itself to the study of how humanity attributes meaning to articulated signs. However, no study has been made on
the problem of giving meaning to those things which are not sounds and consequently not language, but nevertheless are intertwined with our existence. The problem of differentiating the two has perhaps generated from the fact that “everything which signifies in the world is always more or less mixed up with language” (Barthes Semantics 180). It is therefore, according to Barthes, almost impossible to find signifying systems of objects in pure state as it is hard to negate the presence of language which intrudes in the form of captions, titles or articles. However, he asserts that there are ways in which objects can signify in this contemporary world. Here he emphasizes that ‘signify’ has a stronger sense than ‘communicate’: whereas the latter means conveying information, the former, apart from providing information, comprises of a structured system of signs which are systems of differences, oppositions and contrasts.

Before analyzing how objects can signify, Barthes iterates the requirement of defining an object. On consulting dictionaries we shall find that the object is primarily what is presented to sight, secondarily in relation to the subject who thinks it is what is thought and these attributes can be summed up in the most vague definition that we get, that is, “the object is something”. (Barthes 180) This definition does not give us any concrete information about the nature of the object unless we endeavor to analyze the connotations associated with the word ‘object’. According to Barthes there are two major groups of connotation: first and foremost being the initial group that is created by the existential connotations of the object. The object is perceived as something that is specifically ‘non-human’ and that exists ‘against’ us; they define the human through being non-human. Literature has time and again dealt with this non-human aspect of the object and Barthes himself gives the example of Sartre’s Nausea where objects doggedly
exist independently and externally to man, thereby invoking a feeling of nausea in the narrator when he confronts his own hand or the tree trunks in a city park. Instances of objects existing ‘against’ us can be found in Ionesco’s plays where we encounter “a kind of extraordinary proliferation of objects” as objects violate man who cannot protect himself from this onslaught and is almost smothered and suffocated by their overbearing presence (180). Barthes has also identified a comparatively heightened aesthetic treatment of the object by the painter of still life or in cinema where some directors like Bresson reflect on the object. These artists represent objects as possessing an essence that can be modified and reconstituted. In literature, however, alongside art, and particularly what is known as the New Novel, objects are “precisely described in its strict appearance” (181). The objects, therefore, tend to navigate towards a kind of subjectivity and appear before us with several meanings.

Barthes has mentioned another set of connotations which he calls the “technological connotations” of the object (181). According to this grouping the object is defined as what is manufactured or produced. It is constituted of finite substance and subjected to standardization. This object has to satisfy certain standards of fabrication and certain measures of quality. When passed through these various stages the object becomes an element of consumption and this concept of the object is reproduced in many editions: objects like a pen, a watch, a telephone, a plate and many such others belong to this category and these common objects signify certain uses and functions. As a result the object does not become infinitely subjective; on the contrary, it acquires the quality of being exclusively social. It is this social connotation of an object that has been referred to by Marx in Das Capital that shall be discussed elsewhere.
The object is commonly associated with its usage, what Barthes defines as “something used for something” (181). Thus the object is primarily entirely related to its function, that is, in the sole existence of its usage. This leads to the object acquiring a kind of transitivity: “the object serves man to act upon the world, to modify the world, to be in the world in an active fashion; the object is a kind of mediator between action and man” (181). It is intriguing that there exists no object for ‘nothing’ – even useless baubles satisfy an aesthetic craving. This generates a paradox as objects are perceived as pure instruments as they have certain functions and purposes, the prime being the ability to communicate information, but actually they have some more possibilities. By effectively conveying information, objects attain an infinite limitation: “there is always a meaning which overflows the object’s use”; the information supplied have certain added dimensions to them that take the object beyond the apparent meaning that is conveyed thereby leading to the possibility of excess (181). Barthes gives examples of certain objects to prove his point; it is true that the telephone is used for long distance communication but this object often signifies certain meanings which range beyond the mere functionality: various phones may convey various periods of time during which they were used, a white phone may bring associations of femininity or luxury thereby citing gender preferences or affordability, there may be phones which are crisply official. Similarly the pen may become something more than a writing instrument; it may convey the amount of wealth of the owner, simplicity or preferences. Even objects as trivial as the plates we eat out of usually have a meaning as they may signify a casual or a formal and elaborate arrangement. This prompts Barthes to assert that “there is no object which escapes meaning” (182).
Thus the time has come when we must identify the precise point at which objects acquire a meaning, that is, when the semantization of an object takes place. Barthes avers that the object acquires specific meanings as soon as it is created and produced in large numbers for the human society. It acquires certain inviolable connotations when it is manufactured according to certain generalized norms so that it becomes appropriate for mass consumption and we notice here a reiteration of the concepts enumerated by Marx regarding commodities. Barthes in this respect gives the example of the poncho which was developed by the Roman soldiers by slitting blankets to protect themselves against the hostile environment, the rain, the wind and the cold. At that time the garment had no existence of its own, “it had no name”, it existed solely for the purpose it fulfilled (182). But as soon as they were created for mass consumption in large numbers and provided a certain standardized form, it became essential to give a name to this particular kind of garment, and thus was produced the poncho or the ‘penule’. This newly fashioned object carried a connotation that was radically different from the innocuous blanket – that of ‘militariness’ by virtue of its association with the soldiers. The poncho has now been totally feminized in some cultures. Therefore the re-signification of objects is also a common occurrence.

This brings us to the fact that all objects belonging to the society have a certain meaning. There may be a possibility that objects which are improvised have no fixed meaning but even this cannot happen as Lévi-Strauss has shown in The Savage Mind that the creation of an object by an amateur is in itself an act of imposition of a definite meaning on it. Barthes makes clear that the function of any object is always transformed, at least, into the sign of that function; in our society we cannot find objects which do not
have any kind of functional supplement. In order to prove his point Barthes gives two examples:

a) the telephone on the author’s desk invokes the function of communication that is primarily associated with this object. Nevertheless, it also lends itself to various other interpretations such as the necessity of the author to have contacts as part of his profession. The phone, thus, becomes more than an instrument of communication; it indicates the nature of the author’s profession and his requirement to communicate with other people.

b) the glass of water on his desk is definitely used to quench his thirst. The object also serves to signify that it is required due to the nature of the author’s profession – the very fact that he is a lecturer and hence needs the assistance of water to enable him to speak comfortably.

We thus realize that the object is a ‘sign’ like language – it has, apart from the apparent meaning, another connotation that may be unearthed from its surrounding and that exists vis-a-vis the context in which it is positioned. The object, according to Barthes, may be said to be placed at the intersection of two definitions or two coordinates. Barthes calls the first coordinate a symbolic one as he elucidates that every object refers to a signified and as such has a certain “metaphorical depth” (183). He takes the examples from the world of advertising: a lamp in a commercial must signify the evening or more precisely the nocturnal surrounding that necessitates the use of the lamp. Similarly in a French advertisement for Italian pasta, the three colours green, white and red serve to remind the viewer of the Italian flag thereby associating itself with a certain Italianness. Therefore, “every object is at least the signifier of the signified” (183).
The second coordinate is termed as the coordinate of taxonomy or classification which signifies that we spontaneously learn to classify objects in certain manners, either consciously or unconsciously as these are predetermined by the society. In certain spheres of our lives such classification is absolutely essential, for example, in heavy industry or big businesses where all the components such as nuts, bolts or screws must be stored and used according to their particular attributes which are classified. Such classification is also imperative in the departmental stores otherwise it would lead to irresponsibility on the part of the owners due to the inconvenience caused to the customers. The encyclopedia also requires such classification of objects if the words are not recorded in alphabetical order.

Thus from the earlier discussions we can understand that the object is always a sign that is bound by two coordinates – an intrinsic and deep symbolic coordinate and an extended coordinate of classification. In the identification of the meaning of an object the first hurdle is what Barthes calls “the obstacle of the obvious”, that is, the object has a primary meaning attached to it and it is very difficult for us to negate or not pay attention to this specific connotation (184). Therefore, we must shock ourselves into a detachment from this obvious meaning if we desire to open ourselves to further meanings associated with the object. We may employ the help of advertising, the theatre or the cinema to understand or dissect how the object is presented simultaneously in a “spectacular, rhetorical and intentional” manner (184). The objects in such a representation may not only be real but be somehow detached from reality – a simple representation is not enough, but certain required signs or changes must be incorporated into the object in order to reflect the underlying meaning.
By referring to these artificial entities such as cinema, theatre or advertising we might, therefore, identify certain signifiers and signifieds. As is the case with any other system of signs, the signifiers of objects would be certain material entities such as shapes, colours, attributes and accessories. Barthes identifies two main states of the signifier; the first being the symbolic relation between the object and the signified. The signifier, in this case has a purely symbolic state and this occurs when the object refers to a single signified as seen in the important anthropological symbols such as the cross or the crescent. Such objects are essentially limited as people have a “finite reservoir” of such objects which contain essentially fixed meanings that are historical. Barthes identifies this as a sort of science or a discipline that is termed as *symbolics* (185). He laments that though past societies were familiar with such analyses the present civilization does not care to delve deep into these legacies and consequently has lost access to this knowledge. He proves his point by exemplifying an advertisement for a brand of trucks. Here lack of knowledge has led to the use of the image of a cross over a hand to convey longevity whereas according to age old religious connotations such an image symbolizes death. Poor knowledge of symbolics has led to the depiction of the exactly opposite concept resulting in confusion and ridicule. Closely related is the case of displaced relations which means that though the object is perceived in its entirety, it is signified by only one of its attributes, for example, an orange calls our attention because it is juicy, the beer attracts us because it is cold, etc. Thus there is a displacement of the sign, what Barthes calls a displacement by metonymy, that is, by “a skidding of meaning” (186). This makes the signifying element perceptible as we can understand it very clearly – the orange
serves as a support system for its quality of juiciness which has been converted to its sign.

The second state of the signifier involves the significations attached to the collections of objects. The objects are collected, pluralized and this gives rise to extended meanings due to the conglomeration of these objects. In this case we must not consider the object to be equivalent to a word or the collection to be a sentence, on the contrary, the object is already a sentence. Barthes elucidates that in a film the revolver represents the sentence “Here is a revolver.” Thus, though the assemblage of objects signifies a larger group it is never a sentence just as the single object is never a mere name – “an element of a nomenclature” as he calls it (187). Thus the assemblage of objects gives birth to syntagms which are “extended fragments of signs” (Barthes 187). Therefore, an advertisement featuring a man reading in the evening is supposed to convey the sense of rest and relaxation – the use of such objects as the lamp, heavy woolen sweater, the leather armchair or the newspaper in the surrounding creates the effect. The newspaper is extremely suggestive as it is not a book and so is regarded as nothing very serious and only a simple diversion. All these signs given by the various objects declare that it is the perfect setting to have coffee in the evening peacefully without any trouble.

The syntax of objects is essentially of a simple nature “extremely elementary”; the complicated coordinates of the human language cannot be attributed to them (187). All these objects, whether they belong to the street, a room or are objects of the image; are linked only through a single form of connection called parataxis which means “the pure and simple juxtaposition of elements” (187). Such juxtapositions are frequently encountered in our everyday lives; an example would be the furnishing of a room as it
achieves the final meaning called ‘style’ entirely by the particular placement of several elements. Similarly Barthes mentions an advertisement for a particular brand of tea which hints at creating the atmosphere of a particular Englishness or Britishness that is subtler than the mere sense of England. To achieve this many objects are put together – the costume of the man, his moustache, the shutters of British colonial houses, the bottled ships signifying the British enthusiasm for navy and love for horseback riding borne by bronze horses. All these create the sense of Englishness.

There remains a confusion regarding the identity of the signifieds of these systems of objects and also about the information transmitted by the objects. The signifieds depend not on the giver of the message, i.e., the object, but on the receiver, i.e., the reader or the beholder of the object. According to Barthes the object is ‘polysemous’ – it offers several readings of meanings. These readings may vary not only from one reader to another reader, but also within ‘one and the same reader’ as each person has several reservoirs of reading, several glossaries of meanings within themselves. These depend on the kinds of knowledge and the cultural upbringing and consciousness possessed by the reader. When we face an object several interpretations are possible according to our cultural preferences, knowledge of facts and awareness of situation. When we look at an object we may delve deep into our mental recesses – we may make that reading at a psychoanalytic level, make an absolutely individualistic reading; we might impose our own psyche on the viewing of the object, but this does not take away or destroy the codified nature of the object and the systematization to which it is subjected. When we fathom the inner recesses of our minds the meanings that can be identified are surprisingly simple and bound by certain codes and these are the very meanings that
permeate objects and humanity. These discussions lead us to the conclusion that there can be no objects outside meaning. Even if an object is a non-signifying object, it signifies itself as non-significant. Such objects are used in cinema to highlight certain meanings, as the objects appear to be insignificant but in reality carry certain connotations and are therefore never without meanings prompting Barthes to assert that “there are no objects which do not end by supplying a meaning” (189).

Thus while engaging in the “ideal decomposition of the object” three phases are identified (189). The first phase can be identified as the functional value of the object as it presents itself as useful. It stands as a bridge between the world and humanity, for example, the telephone is there because it is used to contact people, the orange exists because it is eaten. In the second phase the function always holds a meaning, for example, the telephone represents certain activities and a whole association of business and communication. The orange instantly appeals as its juice is rich in vitamins. There is, however, a conflict between these two phases. The meaning is a process of equivalences; it is not a process of action which function is. Barthes goes on further to identify a third phase in which the object is converted from mere sign to function. Objects which suggest meanings actually remain functional objects. Again there are objects which conceal meanings. Though in reality we perceive the meanings, that is, the signs; we actually pay attention to the functionality. The raincoat is actually the sign of an meteorological situation which is rain. But when we see the raincoat we pay attention to its function only, which is the protection it provides against rain. This sign can be changed into an unreal or non-existing function, e.g., such raincoats can be made which are fashionable but cannot protect us from rain, thereby failing its purpose.
Meaning is, therefore, always created by culture: imposition of meanings on an object is absolutely culture specific as different cultures attribute different meanings to the same object. A tree may appear to be a mere natural object to one society whereas to another it may signify godhead. In modern societies this meaning which is a phenomenon of culture is constantly naturalized, changed into the nature of the object through speech. This emphasizes the functionality or the transitiveness of the object, for example, a fan exists because it provides us with air, and the telephone is the tool to communicate through. Similarly the glass of water functions its ability to quench thirst precisely because the author is an orator. Thus a full circle occurs – the function which is the ability to quench thirst leads to the meaning: the author needs it because he talks; this again leads to the function of quenching thirst. Thus, objects posit us in a world of uses as well as functions, and at the same time in a world of meanings, significations. Functions generate signs but signs are reconverted into functions. This is the conversion of “culture into pseudo-nature” that defines our societies (190).

In The World as Object Barthes contends that the innumerable objects in the world of humans have accorded them a position of superiority; they have become the masters of the universe, so to say. They hold an absolute sway over these objects as most of them have been invented by them thereby allowing an absolute control over their functions as well as meanings: “[w]here once the virgin presided over ranks of angels, [hu]man stands now, his feet upon the thousand objects of everyday life, triumphantly surrounded by his functions” (Critical Essays, 3-4). Through the myriad objects humans position themselves as the most superior beings in this world as nature becomes inconsequential to their creations. The objects are invested with meanings that give them
another identity than their mere functionality, as the author comments: “. . . [humans] inscribe themselves upon space, immediately covering it with familiar gestures, memories, customs, and intentions” (4). The objects act as instruments through which people inscribe their power – the power of creating the world as nature has. The world that they create with the help of these objects becomes a replication of this universe: “They establish themselves by means of a path, a mill, a frozen canal, and as soon as they can arrange their objects in space as in a room; everything in them tends towards the habitat pure and simple: it is their heaven. . . ” (4). The objects that grant humans a superior position are also those that make them conscious of their humanity. The space that he populates with various objects is his own space over which he has absolute command and authority as he can select and modify his objects: “[a]ll this is [hu]man’s space; in it he measures himself and determines his humanity, starting from the memory of his gestures: his chronos is covered by functions, there is no other authority in his life but the one he imprints upon the inert by shaping and manipulating it”( 5).

Therefore, in this discussion too, Barthes comes back to the three phases in an object. The object is noteworthy for the functional role it plays. But this function actually camouflages the significance: “ An object’s use can only help dissipate its essential form and emphasize instead its attributes. . . each object is accompanied by its adjectives, substance is buried under its myriad qualities, [hu]man never confronts the object, which remains dutifully subjugated to him by precisely by what it is assigned to provide” (5). Thus objects are essential to people as all these objects can be manipulated – they can be supplied with certain meanings and can lend themselves to various interpretations: they have “the detachment and the density of Dutch cheeses: round, waxed,prehensible”( 7).
Thus objects open before us a world of infinite possibilities as our thoughts impregnate the object with certain valences. The object appears before us with not only its shape but also its tangibility, odour and other connotations such as the memories and analogies associated: “they swarm with significations; they have a thousand modes of being perceived and never with impunity” (13). The mere object, thus, holds immense possibilities under the surface which human has explored in literature.\(^5\) It has been the aim of littérature to “discern beneath the surface, the secret of objects” (14-15).

Much of what Barthes opines on objects reminds us of what Marx has to say about them as we are introduced to the power of ideology that obscures and masks the true relevance of objects. He deals with this phenomenon in his article *Fetishism of Commodities* from *Das Capital*, Vol.I, collected in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. The concept of hegemony is relevant here as a manufactured assent to the beliefs and practices are extracted through this ideological association related to several objects. Capitalism influences human relations as they pass through increasing alienation and commodification. As the editors of Norton Anthology comment: “Relationships between workers and owners, buyers and sellers, are mediated through the things produced. These commodities become objects of fetishism – seeming to have an objective existence of their own that obscures the individual labour involved in their production. By being exchanged, they acquire a seemingly inherent value distinct from their use value or physical properties” (762).

Marx analyzes that a commodity appears to be a very simple and insignificant ‘trivial’ thing that is very easily understood. But in reality if we analyze it properly it will be found that it has many layers to it to the point of queerness as it abounds in
“metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx 776). When we analyze an object it must be kept in mind that it has no mysteriousness attached to it, either from the point of view that it consists of properties that are supposed to satisfy human wants or the very fact that those properties are manifested by human labour.

Marx here gives an example to show how natural objects change into commodities by human workings. Nature has furnished man with various materials which he uses and reshapes for his own convenience. Man makes use of these natural objects and creates new products which remain basically the same until it is produced as a commodity. Marx gives the example of a wooden table in this regard. Man creates a table out of the wood provided by nature. Though the material remains the same, that is, wood, the newly fashioned object, that is, the table acquires a life and identity of its own as soon as it steps out as a commodity. His words are noteworthy in this regard: “. . . [as] soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than ‘table-turning’ ever was” (776).

Therefore, commodities acquire a certain mystical character which does not generate from their usage value. Neither does it originate from the determining factors of value. It is interesting to note that as soon as any product of labour assumes the form of a commodity, it acquires a character that can best be called enigmatic. The form of the commodity is extremely important in this respect. Each and every object or commodity is supposed to have the same value as they are products of human labour. The mutual relations of the producers also impinge upon the internal relations between the objects.
This transforms the commodities into mysterious things as they are the products on which the social character of the labour of man appears to be imprinted as an objective character. This is the result of the fact that the relation that ought to exist between the producers of the objects is transferred to being a social relation between the products of their labour, i.e., the objects. As a result the products or the objects are transformed into commodities and these commodities acquire a social identity having certain qualities which are identifiable and unidentifiable at the same time by the senses. The perception of the object in this way, however, is differentiated from the mere act of seeing anything by Marx. When we see any object the light from that object establishes itself as an objective form of something that exists independently and separately from the eye that perceives it. We can easily recognize that it is not the mere excitation of our optic nerve. But there is no denying the fact that during this perception there is an actual flow of light from the externally perceived object and the eye of the beholder. This relation is absolutely physical which is diametrically opposite to the relation between the objects which depends upon value alone. It is the tendency of people to transfer the social relation existing between themselves to an assumed relation between objects, which Marx calls the “fantastic form of a relation between things” (777).

In order to show how objects gain certain meanings Marx compares this act of attributing values to religion. According to him, the human brain construes certain features that are magical or divine in nature. These features are attributed to certain objects which acquire religious connotations. The same is the case with other objects or commodities as we impose on them an identity of their own through their association with certain assumed values. We confer human power on inanimate objects and accept
that they can have relations among themselves and also with human beings who use them. This he terms “[f]etishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, [as] soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (777). Marx further elucidates how the articles of utilities are transformed into commodities. The products are created by individuals or groups of people unknown to one another. As they do not meet each other no relation exists among them except through the objects which they produce – they do not have individual relations that exist among co-workers, instead, there exists “material relations between persons and social relations between things” (777). As the products are exchanged they gradually acquire a uniform social status which is considered to be their value. When useful articles are produced for circulation and exchange, the manufacturer has to remember and consider the intrinsic value attached to it and it is at this point that the two components of an object, its usefulness and its value come to be differentiated.

When the value of any product is fixed the human labour behind them is never considered to be homogeneous. On the contrary, the very contrariety and variety of human labour is stressed upon. The value attached to every object makes it indecipherable as Marx comments: “It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic” (778). He argues that we ourselves confer the identity of ‘social product’ on simple objects of utility by associating certain values with them. This act of imprinting a commonplace object with certain values is almost like creating language as it is a unique form of communication. It is all the more interesting as later we try to excavate meanings and interpretations from these social products which we ourselves have created.
The value of any object is determined after their exchange value is formulated. Marx gives an example in this regard. These values are imposed in such a manner that they attain a fixity that is comparable to the weight of any object. A pound of gold and a pound of iron, irrespective of their chemical and physical constitutions, weigh the same. Through the values attached to them two ounces of gold will appear to have the same value as one ton of iron. Thus this imposed value obtains a kind of stability which is independent of the “will, foresight and action of the producers” and the producers are governed by the action of objects instead of governing the objects, which should have been more desired (Marx 779).

Marx makes a distinction between objects that are commodities and those which are not. Here he draws upon history to inform us that since the inception of human society people has tried to fashion things which are useful to them. These objects, for example, the objects created by a peasant family such as yarn, linen, clothing etc. for their daily usage cannot be termed as commodities as they are not used in any bartering process. These various useful objects are used only for the personal requirements of the family and though they are products of labour, these are never commodities as they are never exchanged outside the family or through a social chain of barter. This may have a parallel to the tale of Robinson Crusoe which Marx mentions in his article. It is true that Crusoe also produced certain objects like tools and furniture but these were produced to satisfy his own requirements. Apart from the few objects such as a watch, ledger, pen and ink which he salvages from the shipwreck, he makes those objects which are absolutely essential for his survival on that hostile island and he allots his time according to the difficulties in making the objects He records the objects made by him and the labour time
required for their creation. This relation between objects and the associated labour – time, according to Marx, “contain all that is essential to the determination of value” (780). Therefore, these objects, whether produced in the fictitious world of Robinson Crusoe or in a peasant family for its own consumption, are by virtue of being the exclusive results of their personal labour, essentially personal products.

The products or objects that are circulated amongst communities have been termed, on the contrary, by Marx as a “social product” (781). Marx further contends that this society is dependent upon the manufacture of objects as commodities as the producers of these very commodities engage in social relations with one another reducing their individual skills to “the standard of homogeneous human labour” (781). For such a society the preferred religion would naturally be Christianity due to its adoration of the concept of the abstract man. This is contrary to the ancient civilizations enumerated by Marx which did not uphold the transformation of products or commonplace objects into commodities and was vehemently against the transformation of men into mere “producers of commodities” (782). These societies were seldom trading nations and hence did not require objects for barter and exchange, thereby being immunized against the manufacture of commodities. However, these societies, in spite of being “extremely simple and transparent” cannot be the role model as despite being based on a bond between the fellowmen of their close-knit societies, they are controlled by the laws of subjugation (782).

Therefore, Marx deduces that all commodities have certain fetishism inherent in them and the social characteristics of labour appear through these objects. There is, however, much debate on the part played by Nature in determining the exchange-value
of each object. The author contends that Nature is in no way responsible as the object acquires its exchange-value through a social process that enumerates the amount of labour that has been required for its manufacture. The creation of the object as a commodity is according to Marx, “the most embryonic form of bourgeois production” and being made an appearance at a very early stage of human history, it is quite natural that this would lend itself to fetishism (783). However, this simplified understanding fails to explain the establishment of the “illusions of the monetary system” and how gold and silver come to be associated with the value they have, being not products of human skill and endeavor but natural objects with unusual characteristics (783).

Marx concludes his article with a remarkable distinction he makes between exchange-value and value. He says that the intrinsic quality of an object is its inherent property or its value. A diamond or a pearl is valuable because of their particular qualities which are neither changeable nor interchangeable. The human beings are only concerned with the use-value of objects. Marx further draws a distinction between the values associated with people and those with objects: the property that characterizes an object is ‘value’, that is, exchange value, whereas that which characterizes human is ‘riches’, that is, use-value. Riches do not imply exchanges, but value definitely does. The attributes of a pearl or a diamond can never be exchanged and this leads to the realization that “the use value of objects belongs to them independently of their material properties, while their value, on the other hand, forms a part of them as objects” (783). Therefore Marx deduces that there forever exists a direct relation between objects and man and this determines the use value of those very objects that come into contact with mankind and this use value is
independent of any kind of exchange. Exchange is essential, on the other hand, for the realization of their value as it is a social process and requires cultivation.

It is interesting to see how the fetishism attached to objects has reflected itself during the selection of the symbols associated with Communism. For example, the hammer and sickle has become the Communist symbol as it appears on the flags of most of the Communist parties. The hammer universally stands for the industrial working class whereas the sickle belongs to the farmer who symbolizes agriculture. When the two symbols are used together they represent the unity of these two working classes which is the essential base of Marxism. The values associated with the hammer and sickle are power and efficiency respectively and a happy blending of the two is essential for the stable run of the proletariat. Though used first during the Bolshevik Revolution, the hammer and the sickle, which was originally the image of a hammer and a plough, became the official symbol of the Russian Republic in 1924. It has been projected by some anthropologists that this symbol, so removed from religion, was actually a Russian orthodox symbol – the Russian two-barred cross, which was adopted and modified by the Communist party to provide an alternative to the religious needs that Communism was replacing.

Another symbol that is closely connected with communism is the red star and it often stands for the five fingers of the worker’s hand which controls the five continents of the world. The five angles of the star represent the five components of communist society such as the peasants, workers, soldiers, intellectuals and the youth. This red star becomes an example of the changeability of meaning as it acquired dreaded connotations during
the Second World War as it was used as a badge to mark Communists in German concentration camps.

There are several other objects which are often associated with the Communist party, though they are not necessarily Communist in nature. Many proletarian objects such as hoes, cogwheels or picks are used to connote the Communist leanings. Interestingly, the Korean Worker’s Party uses a brush to represent the intelligentsia. The wreaths of wheat, cotton, corn and other crops have been used traditionally on the crests of almost every communist state as they bring out associations with agriculture. Another object is the “open book” that is used on the crests of countries like Mozambique, Angola and Afghanistan. Whereas the association between the industrial worker and the agriculture labourer is a common refrain in most Communist symbols, the Far Eastern Republic of Russia has an anchor crossed over a spade or a pickaxe to represent the union of fishermen and miners. Weapons have also been associated with the Communist parties as revolution has required power struggle and hence the use of the rifle such as the AK-47 on the flag of Mozambique or the sword and shield as the KGB emblem. The opposite idea is represented through the flag of the Communist Party of Britain which, designed by Mikhal Boneza in 1988, makes use of a hammer along with a dove to emphasize the party’s connection with the peace movement.

Therefore, certain objects acquire connotations which become so obvious that any contradictory usage shocks and surprises us. As in the case of the hammer and the sickle, they have become so intricately related to the beliefs of Communism that their use on the Austrian coat of arms appears as a surprise. Both these objects feature prominently although they are not superimposed on one another. The eagle on this flag holds a golden
sickle in its right talon and a golden hammer in its left talon. These tools do not represent Communism; instead they are used to signify the agricultural and industrial laborers. As the eagle wears a golden crown, it is the unity between the working class and the former aristocracy that is being hinted at.

When the commonplace objects of daily life become symbols they acquire an identity that is metonymic and unique and are viewed according to that acquired meaning. It is for this that the hammer and sickle is a popular symbol among people with leftist or socialist leanings. Western Europe particularly allows the symbol to be displayed in public and there is no social stigma attached. On the contrary, many countries of Eastern Europe consider the hammer and sickle symbol to be of a “totalitarian and criminal ideology”, consequently public display of the red star as well as the hammer and sickle is considered to be a criminal offence. The Communist symbols have so affected the psyche of these nations that the Republic of Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Latvia have imposed a total ban on these symbols along with other overtly communist symbols. These symbols have such long and deep associations with oppression in this part of Europe that they generate painful memories comparable to the holocaust. As a result the foreign ministers of Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary and the Czech Republic pushed for a European Union-wide ban on any type of Communist symbol in 2010.

An explanation of this attitude can be found in the theorization by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his writing on totemism as he says:

In order that social order shall be maintained . . . , it is necessary to assure the permanence and solidarity of the clans which compose the society.
This permanence and solidarity can be based only on individual sentiments, and these, in order to be expressed efficaciously, demand a collective expression which has to be fixed on concrete objects:

\[
\text{Individual sentiments of attachment} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Ritualized collective conduct} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Object representing the group}
\]

This explains the place assigned to symbols such as flags, kings, presidents etc. in contemporary societies (59-60).

In post-Communist era the anger and hatred directed towards certain objects signify that these objects have been acting like totems, that is, there has developed through long associations a “ritual relation” between man and these objects (59). By a ‘ritual relation’ Lévi-Strauss means “a collection of attitudes and obligatory ways of behaving” that restricts and directs the responses of human beings whether they subscribe to it or not (59).

The word “totem” has been taken from Ojibwa, which is an Algonquin language of the area that belongs to the north of the Great Lakes of northern America and totemism has been defined by W.H. R Rivers as a conglomeration of three elements, that is, a) the social – the connection of a vegetable or an animal or an inanimate object or objects to a particular group, b) the psychological – the belief in the existence of kinship between the members of the group and the object, c) the ritual – an unconditional respect for the object or animal, that is, the totem. This relationship has a restrictive edge as according to a consensus published in the sixth edition (1951) of Notes and Queries on Anthropology,
a collective work published by the Royal Anthropological Institute which Lévi-Strauss mentions, totemism occurs when; a) the totem groups have a certain relation to an inanimate or animate object or objects, b) the relation between the object and the social groups are of the same general kind, c) the membership of these totem groups cannot be changed.

It is this sense of kinship and the subsequent dread associated with its over imposing nature that perhaps caused the arrest of Hungarian politician Attila Vajnai in 2003. He was handcuffed, arrested and fined for wearing a red star on his lapel during a demonstration against which he appealed to the European court of Human Rights who exonerated him by terming the ban imposed by Hungary as “indiscriminate” and “too broad.”

Foucault has directed his attention to the concept of objects in *The Order of Things* (1970). He brings in a situation where resemblances and signs are no longer allied, similarities are considered to be unreal or a deviation from the norm as they recall madness. Objects are confined within their “ironic identity” as they no longer signify anything other than that very identity which confronts us. Foucault reminds us of the madman when the signs are amputated from the similitude as this leads to a separation of two experiences placing face to face two identities. The concept of an acquired identity becomes important to this socially ostracized person as he imposes meanings on everything: “[h]e inverts all values and all proportions, because he is constantly under the impression that he is deciphering signs: for him the crown makes the king” (Foucault 49).

So the madman, according to Foucault, is concerned with the similarities existing everywhere as “for him all signs resemble one another, and all resemblances have the
value of signs” (49). Foucault compares the poet to the madman in that he identifies the similarities between apparently dissimilar objects; he “rediscovers the buried kinships between things, their scattered resemblances” (49). The madman gathers all signs together according to their resemblances and fulfils the function of what is called “homosemanticism” (49). The poet fulfils an opposite function as he tries to capture the signs of resemblance underlying the apparent distinctions and differences thereby playing the ‘allegorical’ role. These two contradictory ways of looking at objects have resulted in a new perspective: “what has become important is no longer resemblances but identities and differences” (50).

Foucault draws our attention to the 17th century when the concept of resemblance was no longer desired but rather avoided as the identification of similitude was considered to be a fault or a threat which is best avoided as it often generates confusion. Foucault quotes Descartes who in the opening lines of his Regulae makes us aware of the dangers inherent in identifying resemblances between objects: “when we discover several resemblances between two things we attribute to both equally, even on points in which they are in reality different, that which we have recognized to be true of only one of them.” (51).8 Foucault further alerts us to the erroneous and indiscriminate application of the same name to objects which are of different nature and refers to Francis Bacon who has termed these as the “idols of the market”.9 The mind must be prudent enough to avoid such mistakes by recognizing the differences present in nature.

To establish a relation between a sign and the signified referred to, we must apply two types of comparisons: one prompts us to establish relations of equality and inequality; the other organizes differences according to the smallest components. Thus
analysis proceeds from similarities to differences and this leads to the establishment of the identity of the object. However this does not take away the ambiguity of its identity as “[a] thing can be absolute according to one relation yet relative according to others” (54). The analytical tool of similarity and difference, thus, dislocates the concept of resemblance as the fundamental category of knowledge. This gives birth to what Foucault identifies as “rationalism” and leads to the questioning of the 16th century concept of the interweaving of language and things. A fundamental shift is noted in the 17th century in recognizing the resemblance as the identity and difference must now be pinpointed according to its position in an order. The presence of “infinite similitudes” now come to be harnessed and comparison “can attain to perfect certainty” (55). This certain knowledge can be arrived at through exhaustive enumeration and by establishing a link between the different layers of the order of things. In establishing this order of things discrimination will play a greater role than grouping things based on certain similarities. This leads Foucault to establish signs as tools of analysis that signify difference as well as identity on the one hand and on the other irrefutable resemblance of things that places before us “the problem of immediate resemblances, of the spontaneous movement of the imagination, of nature’s repetitions” (58).

Foucault posits a chronological history of the development of the concept of the sign. In the Classical Age the sign was defined according to three variables: i) a sign can either be such that one is sure of its constancy and accuracy or it can be simply probable, ii) a sign may be a part of the whole that it represents or be dissociated from it, iii) a sign may be natural as in a mirror image, that is, true to what exists in reality or conventional as is seen when certain names are attributed to certain things. The 16th century envisaged
signs to be imposed on things so that their secrets and virtues could be unearthed and this discovery led to the justification of the existence of signs. Since the 17th century signs escaped the realm of the unknown. This does not establish that men have acquired knowledge about all probable signs but “because there can be no sign until there exists a known possibility of substitution between two known elements. The sign does not wait in silence for the coming of a man capable of recognizing it: it can be constituted only by an act of knowing” (59). The element of divinity or divinatio as Foucault calls it thus becomes segregated from the concept of signs as they come to be associated with the signified not by any divine insertion of knowledge but through a conclusion arrived at after a long series of judgments. Foucault also muses upon the relation between the sign and what it signifies and reasons that the sign must be “simultaneously an insertion in that which it signifies and also distinct from it” (60). To identify the sign with an object we must be introduced to the term precisely at the moment we encounter it. The sign is constructed on the basis of judgment and this construction becomes intricately linked to analysis as it is precisely the gift of analysis without which the sign could not have been arrived at. At the same time it plays the role of the instrument of the analysis as it can be applied to further instances. Thus the sign is established through the analysis of the mind and these very signs continue further analyses thereby allowing to sum up the function of signs: “[i]t is the sign that enables things to become distinct, to preserve themselves within their own identities, to dissociate themselves or bind themselves together” (61). This leads us to the third variable that Foucault identifies. The knowledge that signs can be either given by nature or by humans has been there since long but artificial signs have always been considered dependent on natural signs. However the 17th century is witness
to a reversal in this respect; the natural sign becomes constricted, rigid and troublesome in its scope as it is pre-selected from the variety of natural objects and identified as a sign. The human made sign, on the other hand, is that which grants supremacy to the human over animals as it combines simplicity, easy recollectivity and wide applicability. Thus in the Classical Age the use of signs led to the discovery of the use of “probability, analysis and combination” and contributed to the formation of a “universal language system” (63).

The sign thus becomes connected to the signified through a bond that presents the idea of one thing through that of another. The thing represented reminds us of the thing that is being represented by it. This concept is in contrast with the Renaissance when sign is considered to be formed of three distinct elements: that object which is marked, the object used for marking and thirdly the sign which enables us to identify in the former the mark of the latter, the sign that is called resemblance. Foucault makes it clear that there is a distinction between the signifying element and the sign. The signifying element can only become a sign when it manifests the relation that relates it to the object that it signifies. Thus an object becomes a sign because it represents another object, but it is essential, as Foucault says, that the “representation, in turn, must also be represented within it” (64). When we look at an object that represents or reminds us of another, the idea we have of this first object is the idea of a sign and this first object itself is called a sign. Foucault identifies three terms generated in this process: the idea that is signified, the idea that signifies and the idea of its role as representation. Foucault maintains that this signifying object is devoid of any content, function or determination other than what is represented by it, it is absolutely transparent. That which is represented exists within the scope of the sign. The example of the drawing as picture is noteworthy in this regard:
the picture does not have any other subject other than which it represents, but this content becomes visible to us solely due to the fact that it is represented by a representation. Therefore, an idea or object becomes a sign of another idea or object as it is possible to establish a bond of representation between them. Another prerequisite is that the idea that represents must display this representation. Foucault gives the entire relation in details: “representation in its peculiar essence is always perpendicular to itself: it is at the same time indication and appearance; a relation to an object and a manifestation of itself” (65). The sign becomes the representibility of the representation as much as is possible. Foucault identifies several consequences of this phenomenon. First, signs now become extended along the scope of representation; they are positioned within it and are expanded throughout the totality of its scope. The second consequence that emerges is the realization that there is no haziness between the sign and that which it signifies. Signs are entirely governed by the laws that control their contents. Thus through an analysis of signs we can arrive at an unraveling of what they are endeavoring to communicate. All the signs are linked together and this network of signs signifies the image of things. Though the sign has the privilege of holding the meaning, the functioning resides within the scope of that which is signified. The third consequence leads us to the binary theory of the sign: if we accept the fact that the sign is a simple and honest connector between the signifier and the signified, then these two elements are linked only if one represents the other. It is this concept that leads Sassure to attribute the sign a ‘psychologistic’ definition that deals with the linking of a concept and an image.

The sign and the resemblance now respond to each other in a changed manner. While earlier a mark was required by resemblance to allow its secrets to be uncovered,
now the matrix on which knowledge can base its relations and identities becomes unstable and transient. This leads to a double reversal: the basis of resemblance or similitude becomes the requirement of the sign and necessity of content arises that will offer a base upon which forms of knowledge can be applied. Thus, Foucault infers that it is similitude that allows us to know representation through comparisons with other representations. Resemblance is closely linked to imagination as the latter plays an important role in its manifestation and imagination is in turn operable only with the help of resemblance.

Jean Baudrillard in his discourse on objects initiates us to the position enjoyed by objects in our lives. In *The Consumer Society* he makes us aware of the fact that “the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects”( 25). Like Marx he reminds us that objects are generated by human activity and are solely governed by the laws of exchange-value. In his book *The Revenge of the Crystal* he distinguishes between objects that are mythological and those which are purely functional and presently in use. He tries to define the ‘bygone object’ – the object that is appreciated not for its practicality but for its antique value. This object signifies time and so is actually appreciated for the association it provides – we experience the object differently from other contemporary objects. While comparing these two kinds of objects Baudrillard also compares the desires of two social segments when he places civilized people side by side of the so called underdeveloped people. The hankering by civilized people for objects that are separated by space and time can be compared to the desire for technologically advanced objects by less privileged people. The distanced object is desirable as it provides us with a sort of
fulfillment by being related to another time – it is valuable as it “immemorialises a prior being in the form of a concrete object” (37). This is why they are preferable to contemporary practical objects which exist due to their functionality and are limited to the present. Baudrillard clearly demarcates their positions when he draws a distinction: “The functional object is effectual, while the mythological object is complete” (37). The mythological object signifies a sense of continuity that is lacking in the functional object. He discerns two features in the former – a hankering for the origins and a desire for its authentic value. Baudrillard identifies the former with the mother and the latter with the father. Whereas the origin brings the object closer to Nature, the value is attributed to it because it either belonged to some powerful or well-known person or has the mark of its creator. This mythological object allows the being to relate itself to the state of an embryo, the consciousness of an existence before birth, these objects symbolize “internal transcendence” – a journey of the ego into the core of creation, an interaction with one’s own being (39).10

A perfect counterpart to this desire for acquiring the antique can be seen in the desire to possess the technologically advanced objects by the less privileged or underdeveloped social sections. Baudrillard gives the example of a non-Western who covets a watch or a fountain pen, not for its own worth but as a substitution for power. Thus the object “no longer has a function but a virtue: it is a sign” (41). This brings the underprivileged and the civilized on the same platform. Whereas the former searches for technical advancement, the latter seeks an ancestral certainty. Though both search for “virtue” in their coveted objects, in the case of the former it is a concept of power whereas the idea of heredity becomes the focus of attention for the latter. Baudrillard
identifies it as a “mythic projection” in the first case and a “mythic degeneration” in the second (41). Whatever is lacking in human is projected in the object and thus the desire to acquire it. For the modern human both mythological as well as modern functional objects are necessary as they serve the dual purpose of succeeding the Father and also proceeding from the Father. This, Baudrillard identifies as the Promethean ambition that compels a person to oscillate between the role as a descendant of the Creator on the one hand and the identity as the shaper of this modern world on the other. The objects themselves exemplify this unresolved ambiguity; while some negotiate the past the others negotiate the present. Through their fixedness and stability they act as a substitute to aged wisdom. Baudrillard here identifies a cultural neo-imperialism that is active in the domination of nature through modern technical objects or objects used in everyday lives and also a similar domination over cultures through antique objects.

This brings us to the realization that objects are a source of passion in human beings. Baudrillard identifies this passion as that of private ownership as objects become an entity over which the human being has absolute control – “a mental enclosure over which I rule, a thing for which I am the meaning, a property, a passion” (43). It should be noted that the sense of possession is applicable not to objects which are replete with their functionality as this relates the object to the world and does not allow any exclusivity to the possessor of the object. The sense of absolute authority or possession emanates from the object that is “abstracted of its function and thus made relative to the subject” (43). The separate objects are bound only by the common connection of being related to the subject at this point and gradually form a system of their own by the responses of the subject towards them. Therefore, Baudrillard identifies two aspects of
every object; the identity of being possessed and that of having practical utility. Whereas the latter is confined within the limits of its functionality, the former tends to overflow the constrictions of practical requirements and becomes subjectively qualified.

Baudrillard identifies a sort of comforting illusion provided by objects as they act as a mirror that reflects the images we desire to see. He identifies the object as the most perfect domestic pet. They are preferable to human companions for they inflate the ego of the owner as their qualities “exalt rather than delimit” the identity of the owner (46). Only with objects is coexistence possible and they are not rendered apart by differences, but can be safely controlled and arranged by the owner. Only the object can be wholly possessed without any opposition and so can be personalized. It is that mirror which allows us to see what we want to see instead of offering the truth. However this is also a deception since objects, once accorded certain roles, do regulate our responses to them and compel us to follow those responses that have become associated with them. There is no denying the fact that though the possession of an object makes it absolutely singular, yet it is the cultural domain that specifies the quality or the exchange value of the object. Through our control over these objects we presume that we are the masters of the world and time.

Baudrillard classifies certain objects as “gizmo” which does not have any genuine use. It is identified as a myth-making device as it operates “not through clear logical reason, but according to the fragmented personal mythologies of the individual user” (Lane 33). The gizmo operates through the personal mythologies of the individual and is devoid of clear logicality. He compares the gizmo with the religious icon and opines that the latter is better as it represents a properly structured system of belief constructed
around it. The gizmo actually works in the imaginary world rather than the real and it is through the use of this device that we assume that nature can be automated. A gizmo becomes that contraption which improves upon Nature thereby transforming it into an entity that is constructed like a technological device. Through its mingling with the human desires and fantasies gizmos become restricted as they become limited in their application and positioned in preconceived slots. Thus ultimately the object becomes dysfunctional and lacks true progression. Such replicated or simulated objects are simultaneously used in the modern society with simulated relations when advertisers replicate various intimate relations. Thus we are engulfed in a torrent of superficially constructed emotions and forced personal relations. In this respect the body plays an important role as it helps in selling various commodities and is itself an object that is consumed. In fact Baudrillard identifies the body as one of the finest objects that we are familiar with and this instigates us to fetishize our bodies as we try to enhance the appeal of the body using a wide range of services and products for this purpose. Baudrillard thus imagines a world where the object would have a certain passion of its own; it will take revenge on this materialistic world. He imagines objects having certain passions such as “ruse, irony, indifference” which directly oppose the passions exhibited by the subject that tries to conquer the object, passions like “desire, demand for enjoyment, etc”. He opines that the passion predominantly exhibited by the object is “indifference” (Baudrillard 15). Moreover he identifies the fact that the object is not passive though it is not as active as the subject; but by virtue of being “without desire” it acquires a certain strength that he terms as “radical objectivity” (15). This acts as a privilege to the object as it “escapes the systems of decoding and interpretation” (15).
Martha Nussbaum deals with another way of looking at objects as she dissects the concept of sexual objectification in *Sex and Social Justice*. She rests her observations primarily on the works of Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. The phenomenon of sexual objectification is commonly displayed in various social functions where women are portrayed as dehumanized beings, as sexual objects, commodities or simply as things. This problem has been addressed by feminist thinkers as the problem at the core of a woman’s daily life. Catherine MacKinnon identifies the fact that this close experience of sexual objectification defines and shapes the existence of a woman as a ‘female’ human being. Impacted by how the world views her, the woman “can grasp self only as thing.”¹⁴ That this existence cannot be evaded is put forward by MacKinnon as she compares women to fish. Just as the latter live in water so the former are engulfed by sexual objectification. Here the emphasis is on the fact that such an attitude is internalized by the women and they are nurtured by this very knowledge of their identification as a sexual object. Such objectification is banal as it compromises the humanity of the women as it denies them the power of “self-expression and self determination” (Nussbaum 214).

Nussbaum proceeds to analyze the notions involved in treating a human being as an object and identifies seven of them:

1. Instrumentality – The human is identified as an object by the objectifier and as a tool or instrument to further his/her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy – The object lacks in self-determination and autonomy and thus can be wielded by the objectifier.
3. Inertness – The object seems to have no agency of her own and thus shows inability to act.
4. Fungibility – The objectifier considers the object to be interchangeable in two ways: it can either be substituted with a) other objects of the same type, b) objects that belong to other types.

5. Violability – The objectifier considers the violation or destruction of the object permissible. Here the object is seen as not enjoying the privilege of “boundary integrity” (218).

6. Ownership – The human being is treated as an inanimate object that can be used in the system of exchange, that is, it can be owned, purchased or sold and so on.

7. Denial of subjectivity – The object is viewed as one or a “thing” whose emotions or proficiency is of no importance and can be viewed as nonexistent.

Through identification of these various attributes Martha Nussbaum explicitly defines objectification as exactly the opposite of treating an inanimate thing as an object – “objectification entails making into a thing, treating as a thing, something that is really not a thing”(218). Here the human being is placed in the position of an inanimate object and granted no agency whatsoever. Nussbaum presents three categories of such objectification. The first instance may be seen in the parent – child relationship. Usually such a relation exemplifies “denial of autonomy” to the child as the parents often display some attributes of ownership (222). However, the parents are not supposed to consider their children to be lacking in physical integrity and thus sexual or physical abuse to the child is considered to be universally forbidden. Neither is children treated as inert objects lacking in agency. As to the extent of children’s feelings to be taken into account, opinions vary from one culture to another and there have been debates about their use as instruments to further the purposes of their parents. In this context we are reminded of
Baudrillard as he talks of the attitudes of parents towards their offspring. The children are treated both as subject and object. In the former situation the responses of the child are passive and the child actually ‘becomes object’. In the case of the latter the responses are active as the object is capable of resistance through apparently gratifying modes such as dependency on the parent, overacceptance or even idiocy. Here the object may adopt the Nietzschean form of *ressentiment* by apparently accepting the norms thrust upon him, yet actually having his own way.

The second area of enquiry this Nussbaum refers to has been presented by Marx in his analysis of the identification of workers as objects in capitalism. Workers, he says, lack in autonomy and instrumentality and there is no consideration of their feelings or experiences on the part of their capitalist masters, though Max accedes that despite these limitations they are still regarded as somewhat human and not as mere tools. Workers are conveniently treated as fungible with other capable workers or at times even with machines. But the interesting fact is that they are never treated as inactive precisely because their value lies in their activity. Marx opines that the labourers are more spiritually than physically as they are denied agency by the capitalist producer. The workers are not slaves but they are subjected to a kind of ownership as the master takes away the product of the worker’s labour.

The third example that shows the objectification of a human being is slavery. By its definition it is a form of ownership that has as its basic characteristic the negation of autonomy. Institutionally the owner has the liberty to use the slave as a mere instrument or tool to fulfill his purposes prompting Aristotle to define the slave as “an animate tool” (Nussbaum 222). Thus as soon as a human being is treated as an object that can be
bought or sold, autonomy is taken away from that objectified human being and he becomes a tool to further the purposes of the master. It must be clarified, however, that slaves are not considered to be inert and if they have specialized skills then neither are they accepted as fungible. Lack of specialized skills, on the other hand, set slaves to be viewed as a collection of body parts that can be substituted as another set of body parts, that is, another slave or even by a machine. Despite the presence of laws preventing violation of a slave rape or bodily harm to slaves are very common as denial of agency or authority to the slave results in a sense of right to use the body by the master in whatever way he wishes. Though not always denied subjectivity, the slaves are mostly treated as a mere tool or an object and not as an end and once viewed as such the moral qualms of the objectifier disappears and the emotions, feelings and responses of the slave become absolutely inconsequential. This makes the person so “denuded of humanity” that the objectifier targets him/her for other various abuses and violations as well (223).

This brings us to Kant’s discussion on sexuality and marriage as he identifies sexual desire to be an extremely powerful force that leads people to identify other people as objects as they no longer remain important for their own worth, but as instruments satisfying one’s desires. According to Kant, this leads to the denial of both autonomy and subjectivity, the former as one tends to instruct the behaviour of the objectified for his personal satisfaction and the latter because the objectifier is no longer concerned about the feeling or emotion of the objectified. This denial of autonomy to the objectified leads, in the opinion of Dworkin, to the sadistic violation so commonly found in sexual love. Kant opines that in a normal sexual relation the roles of the objectifier as well as the object are enacted by both the individuals involved. But the hierarchically structured
society forces men and women to view desire differently. Whereas domination becomes primarily important for men, women are conditioned to offer themselves as objects and enjoy sex by being dominated. This translates to the fact that it is the female “for whom sex entails a forfeiture of humanity, being turned into something rather than someone” (225). This involves the loss of autonomy as well as subjectivity leading to physical and mental violation and abuse. Thus, through various instances Nussbaum infers that objectification of other human beings is an attractive proposition because that raises one to the height of a “dizzying experience of power” (233). It scores over other achievements simply because it entails domination over that entity which can display the possibility of thwarting domination, as Nussbaum says, “because it manifests greater control, it shows that one can control what is of such a nature as to elude control” (235). This allows the objectifier to establish himself in an exemplary position – a position of absolute authority that refuses the primary quality of humanity to another fellow human being. “Objectification”, as Nussbaum concludes, “means a certain sort of self-regarding display” and is a complex concept that requires a great deal of investigation (235).

One must not forget to analyze the observations of American psychologist William James on human behaviour that is dependent on first formed preferences. He points out that any habit is created and fixated on a particular object though it might have happened that if any other object had been presented earlier, that very object would have been the point of fixation. This prompts him to identify two principles of “non-uniformity in instincts” (Hess 46). The first principle concerns itself with the fact that when an animal is confronted for the first time with an object of a particular type, his attention is fixed on this object and he rejects any other object presented hereafter. According to the
second principle several instincts mature at a particular age and then gradually fade away. If at this time objects suitable for its arousal are met with then a tendency or habit is formed that acts on these objects. But if no such object is presented at the time of the arousal of that particular instinct, no attachment is formed with the objects and they will not elicit any response when confronted with in future by the animal or human being. This law of transience of instincts has also been exhibited in the example shown by Spalding who recorded the refusal of a hand-reared chick to follow its own mother when it met her some time after its birth thereby concentrating its attention on Spalding as he has been the first object to have come into contact with the chick.

Attachments to objects can be viewed during various sensitive periods in the development of a child’s mind. The famous child psychologist Montessori identifies a certain phase in the child’s life when he has an enormous capability to receive imprint of the external environment in which he resides. Beginning from six months and continued till the age of five the familiar objects of the child’s environment acquires such prominence that the child may be emotionally attached to the features of the climate and even geographical features of his environment. Montessori compares such responses of the child to the responses made towards its own body parts. Both, according to her, form an integral part of the child’s identity and contributes to the shaping of his individuality.

This identification of a critical period in the development of the child’s personality has been analyzed in greater details by the Austrian zoologist Konrad Lorenz. He has reasoned that there exists a critical period for the formation of a bond between young ducklings and their mother and if perchance they were expose to him instead of their mother immediately after hatching they would consider him as the mother figure
and pay no attention to their original mother. Similarly, if only the mother was around in this critical period their attention would be focused on the biological mother alone. This process of bond formation has been called by Lorenz as ‘imprinting’. He makes it clear that before the process of imprinting takes place the animal has the possibility of accepting any object as its parent, but after imprinting is done, only the particular object identified during the process will generate favorable responses.

Such a drive to attach itself to a parental object so common in animals has been found in human beings too thereby suggesting the possibility of an “imprinting-like social attachment process in human beings” (341). While dealing with the possibility of imprinting in humans, Rollman-Branch finds similarities between the fear responses of unimprinted animals and death of infants deprived of motherly contacts around six months. This proves that “object relationships are a primary need of both animals and men” and is not secondary to the satisfaction of physical requirements (342). Analogies can also between the fear response to strangers of a human child during his period of crawling and the distress behaviour of young birds when they are confronted with new and unknown objects. There is evidently a desire to search for the known object to which the bird or the child has already related itself. This relation to a particular object is established through an “ability to fixate an object” (344). As suggested by Ambrose, the mother’s eyes are the first objects on which the human infant concentrates its attention. Thus it may be concluded that “the imprinting process could have been independently seized upon by both mammals and birds for use in the development of social behaviour systems as well as of other object-response relationships” (346).
Therefore, though not very prominently, objects and their valence have been the focus of attention in some critical theory. We can understand that in all cases the objects acquire certain connotations that go beyond their spatial and temporal identities. It is this overflowing meaning that shall be used to delineate the several roles played by apparently insignificant objects in partition fiction which is our area of research. The following chapters shall enquire into the various identities assumed by the objects – their religious implications, gender orientation and many more which assist in the understanding of the troubled times.

Notes:


2. Similar analyses can be made of Eliot’s handling of objects in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Ash Wednesday, Four Quartets* and *A Song for Simeon*.

3. Barthes gives the example of Brecht’s comment on the production of *Mother Courage* where certain detailed and intricate treatment had to be levied on certain objects in the production to invest them with certain meanings.

4. The author refers to Dutch still life paintings to prove his point. He points out that in these paintings the object is never left alone for its own sake, it appeals because it is part of the entirety. The functions of the objects are stressed upon and the objects appear important because they are "utilized".

5. Barthes refers to Robbe – Grillet’s work *The Erasers*.

6. ‘Communist symbols to be banned in Georgia’, *BBC News*, 4 May 2014, retrieved 13 May 2014,


10. Baudrillard equates these objects to legends as they transport man back to his infancy and furthermore to a pre-natal state. This is how certain objects acquire connotations beyond their functional existence. This relation between the subject and the object shall be elaborated in the following chapters.

11. Baudrillard quotes Littre in this regard: “Anything that is cause or subject of a passion. Figuratively and in the broadest sense: the object of affection” (43).

12. He quotes Maurice Rheims who equates the object to “a sort of impassive dog which receives and returns caresses after a fashion, or rather reflects them like a mirror faithful not to real images, but desired images.” La Vie étrange des objects, 1959, p. 59

13. From an interview between Baudrillard and Guy Bellavance.