CHAPTER I
MARXIST CRITICAL THEORY

It is very important to go through the Marxist critical theory before studying or interpreting major novels of R.K. Narayan in Marxist perspective.

Marxism is an economic and sociopolitical worldview. It is a method of socioeconomic enquiry into a materialistic interpretation of historical development, a dialectical view of social change. Marxism is an analysis of class-relations within society and their application in the analysis and critique of the development of capitalism.

The tradition of Marxist thought has provided the most powerful critique of capitalist institutions and ethics ever conducted. Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), the founder of Marxism, was a German political, economic, and philosophical theorist and revolutionist. Marx’s ideas have greatly influenced the modern world history. His impact on the world of thought has been equally extensive, embracing sociology, philosophy economics and cultural theory. Marxism has also generated a rich tradition of literary and cultural criticism. Many branches of modern criticism-including historicism, feminism, and deconstruction, postcolonial and cultural criticism are indebted to the insights of Marxism. It is not only a political, economic and social theory but also a form of practice in all these domains.

Marx’s thought can be understood in terms of philosophical, economic and political strata. As a philosopher, Marx’s development has its roots in his early life. He was born into a Jewish family where his father had imbibed Enlightenment rationalist principles; Marx was exposed to the ideas of Voltaire, Lessing, and Racine. He studied law at the university of Bonn and then Berlin. Marx was very influenced with the work of G. W. F. Hegel. Marx with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), produced a critique of capitalist society based on a materialistic conception of history.

In Marxist theory, human society consists of two parts-the base and superstructure. The base comprehends the forces and relations of production into which people enter to produce the necessities and amenities of life. These relations determine society’s other relationships and ideas, which are described as its superstructure. The superstructure of a society includes its culture, institutions, political power structures, roles, rituals, and state. The base determines the superstructure, yet, their relation is not strictly casual, because the
superstructure often influences the base; the influence of the base, however, predominates.

Marx attempted systematically to seek the structural causes behind the system of capitalist exploitation and degradation, and to offer solutions in the spheres of economics and politics. Marx’s main objection to capitalism was that one particular class owned the means of economic production. The bourgeoisie has centralized the means of production, and has concentrated the property in few hands. It gives rise to the oppression and exploitation of working classes.

Marx’s next objection is the imperialistic nature of the bourgeois enterprise. In order to sustain itself, capitalism must spread its tentacles all over the world: “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production….The need of a constantly expanding market…chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe” (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto* 7). This can be related to character of Raju in *The Guide*, who, as a Manager owner of dance entertainment industry, thinks of new ways to increase to increase his capital. Marx states that bourgeoisie must necessarily give a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. Raw material is drawn from the remotest zones and demand for new product ever increases. Bourgeoisie “compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production” (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto* 9). The bourgeoisie “creates a world after its own image” (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto* 9). Capitalism reduces all human relationships to a cash nexus, self-interest and egoistical calculation.

The importance of the dialectic for Marx stems from his awareness that the bourgeois class has brought down the economic and political edifice of feudalism and absolutism whose social hierarchy rested on irrational theology and superstition. Society could now be organized on rational principles, a freer market economy, and a human subject who saw his individual interests enshrined in the general law. The dialectic provided a powerful political tool to negate a given state of affairs.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* (1844), Marx noticed the importance of labour, through which man creates himself. In religious and economic spheres, Marx advocated two kinds of humanism: atheism, being the suppression of God, is the advent of theoretical humanism, and communism, which implies the supersession of private property, is the advent of practical humanism.
For Marx, the dialectic is practical, not something which offers only a theoretical solution. Marx regarded religion as having an ideologically apologetic function, whereby it situated present miseries as part of providential pattern. Marx and Engels state the effect of religion in *On Religion* as: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature; the heartless world….It is the opium of the people” (39).

In *The German Ideology* (1846), Marx develops his critique of Hegel’s dialectics, which he calls the materialistic conception of history. He viewed the world, human beings and history as a product of human labour. Marx insisted that the dialectic of history was motivated by material forces, by upheavals in the forces and relation of economic production. He states that history is driven by class struggle. He declaims in *The Communist Manifesto* that: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (40).

Marx alludes to the history of class conflict from the ancient world to his own times which is between slaves and freemen, patricians and plebeians, lord and serfs. The major class conflict in modern times is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or industrial working class. As the capitalist mode of production superseded the feudal mode, similarly, the capitalist mode will give way to socialism. It is bourgeoisie itself which creates the instrument of its own destruction: the proletariat, who will unite against it.

Marx insisted that the dialectic in history involved a necessary combination of theory and practice. For him, a given economic and political system cannot be removed by mere thought but by a revolution. Marx thought that the system of bourgeois dominance and capitalist exploitation would end when conditions for the great mass of people had sufficiently deteriorated.

The main premise of the materialistic conception of history is that man’s first historical act is the production of means to satisfy his material needs. The production of life, through both labour and procreation, is both natural and social. A given mode of production is combined with a given stage of social cooperation. Marx states that consciousness is a social product. So, the realms of ideology, politics, law, morality, religion, and art are not independent but are an outcome of an individual’s material behaviour because: “Life is not determined by the consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx, *German Ideology* 51). We will study the character of Margayya in *The Financial Expert* and Raju in *The Guide* to see that consciousness of both these characters is materialistically conditioned.

Marx observes that the class which is struggling for mastery must gain political power in order to represent its interest as the general interest. This is the germ of Marx’s conception of ideology. He states that the class which is the ruling material force of society is
also the ruling intellectual force. Ruling class has at its disposal the means of production. It has power to disseminate its ideas in the realms of law, morality, religion and art, as possessing universal verity. Marx’s notion of ideology is that the ruling class represents its own interests as the interests of the people as a whole. The notion of ideology is helpful in exploring the character of Margayya in *The Financial Expert* who sets up a bank to gain high profit, but pretends to give high interest rates to others.

Marx’s economic views were largely based on the theory of value. He insisted the importance of labour as the foundation of economic life. Marx arrived at his notion of surplus value by making distinction between use value and the exchange value, because labour power as embodied in production is incompletely compensated. Marx sees this form of exploitation as underlying the ultimate downfall of capitalism.

Engels attempted to formulate a scientific basis for socialism, to explore the connections between dialectics and natural science, to analyze working-class conditions as well as the development of family and state. Engels argued that the degraded conditions of the English proletariat, generated by their industrial exploitation, would eventually mold it into a revolutionary political force. It was largely Engels who was responsible for the initial dissemination, clarification, and popularization of Marxist ideas.

In the year after Marx’s death in 1883, Engels wrote *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a text widely regarded as pivotal Marxist document feminist theory since it alone, among the works of Marx and Engels, offers a comprehensive attempt to explain the origin of patriarchy. Engels traced the rise of patriarchy through increasingly sophisticated economic and social configuration, from primitive communal system to a class society based on private property.

Earlier descent and inheritance were through the female line. But as wealth increased, man acquired more important status in the family than woman and the mother right was eventually overthrown. In this, Engels sees an important revolution in prehistory as overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. Engels says that with the predomination of private property over common property, father right and monogamy gains ascendancy, marriage becomes increasingly dependent on economic considerations.

Engels states in *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* that because of economic dependence of the woman on man in bourgeois society, in the modern family the husband “is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat” (105). Marxist feminists
tend to draw upon Marx's base and superstructure model of society in order to argue that
gender discriminations are entirely the function of economic factor, patriarchy is rooted in
economics. We will study *The Dark Room* in the light of Marxist feminism. Engels suggests
that the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of entire female sex
into public industry. When the means of production become common property, the individual
family will cease to be the economic unit of society. Hence the economic foundations of
monogamy as it presently exists will vanish, along with the institutions of the state which
preserved them.

The main concepts of Marxism can be summarized as, the materialistic conception of
history is characterized by a number of features. It is the activity and the conditions of
material production, not mere ideas, which determine the structure of society and nature of
individuals. Law, art, religion and mortality are an efflux of these material relations. The
evolution of division of labour results in the concentration of private property, a conflict
between individual and communal interests, and estrangement or alienation of social activity.
All struggles within the state are euphemisms for the real struggle between classes. It is this
struggle which generates social change. Once the technologically assisted capitalist
accumulation, concentration and world expansion have led to a world of sharply contrasting
wealth and poverty, working classes will become conscious of their historical role. Capitalism
itself will yield to a communism which will do away with private property and base itself on
human need rather that the greed of a minority for increasing profit. The exploitation of
women, an intrinsic feature of capitalist economics, will also be abolished along with private
property and the family as economic unit.

It is important to recognize that the connection between Marx’s canon and Marxism
has always been dialectical. The latter has always striven to modify, extend, and adapt the
former to changing circumstances rather that treating it as definitive and complete. Marxism
is not somehow a finished and static system but has been continually modified according to
changing historical circumstance.

Marx’s critique of capitalism was dialectical. He regarded capitalist society as an
unprecedented historical advance from centuries of benighted and superstitious feudalism.
The bourgeois emphasis on reason, particularly, its technological enterprise in mastering the
world, its ideas of rational law and justice and individual freedom and democracy were all
hailed by Marx as historical progress. His point was not that communism would somehow
displaced capitalism in its entirety but that it would grow out of capitalism and retain its ideals of freedom and democracy.

The essential difference is that a communist society would realize these ideals. Marx points out that the individual in capitalist society is effectively the bourgeois owner of property; individual freedom is merely economic freedom. The constitution and laws are entirely weighted in favour of large business interests and owners of property. Private property is already abolished because most of the population in capitalist society does not possess it. The labour of this vast majority, being commoditized, is as subject to the vicissitude of the market as any other commodity. Such commodification of personal relations can be seen through Rosie in *The Guide* and Savitri in *The Dark Room*.

Marxist aesthetics is a theory of aesthetics based on or derived from the theories of Karl Marx. It involves a dialectical approach to the application of Marxism to the cultural sphere, specifically areas related to taste such as art, beauty etc. Marxist believes that economic and social conditions affect every aspect of an individual’s life, from religious beliefs to legal systems to cultural frameworks. The role of art is not only to present such conditions truthfully, but also to seek to improve them.

Marx and Engels produced no systematic theory of literature and art. They explained the nature of art and its paths of development, its tasks in society and social aims. Marxist aesthetics, like the whole teaching of Marx and Engels, are subordinated to the struggle for the communist reorganization of society.

Now we will discuss the some of the major Marxist intellectuals of strature of Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton who immensely contributed to the development of Marxist critical standards and Marxist aesthetics. It will help us to understand Narayan in a new perspective.

The Hungarian philosopher Georges Lukacs is the foremost Marxist aesthetician of the twentieth century. His important works are *History and Class Consciousness* (1923, translated 1971) and *The Historical Novel* (1962). In his early *Theory of the Novel* (1916, translated 1971) Lukacs considers literary form as an expression of a world view or ideology that originates in economic and cultural relations, and the writer’s experience of these conditions. Literary form acts as the communication device between the writer and the public, with some scope for misreading. For Lukacs, the genre is the essential unit of literary discourse.
In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukacs argued that the proletarian revolution was imminent in the agenda of world history. Reification is the relation between people that takes on the character of the thing and attains a phantom objectivity. Lukacs’ advances on the traditional Marxist notion of mediation. Lukacs argues that commodity exchange and its structural effects influence the outer and inner life of society.

He argued that theory must dismantle the false consciousness of people to produce a revolutionary practice. Theory would then become a material force capable of transforming society.

On realism, Lukacs argues that literature provides a critical understanding of underlying social and historical processes by revealing the contradictions of age.

The artist does not impose an abstract order upon the world, but rather represents the reader with an image of the richness of life from which emerges the sense of order. Realist fiction measures the real against the ideal that is always and never there in reality, so that the deficiencies of the prevalent ideologies can be revealed. The goal of artistic reflection is a picture of reality in which there is unity of essence and appearance, individual case and general principle. The concrete artistic embodiment of particularity is the typical. It is the reproduction of typical feature of the people, feelings, thoughts and objects and also the system of relations into which these typifications are inserted. The text, for Lukacs, possesses its own autonomy only insofar as it establishes a correct correspondence with the immanent meaningfulness of historical life. The work of art is subordinated to a purposeful design located outside of art. The author is merely the medium through which the laws of history came to expression.

Ideology manifests itself in various ways in all stages of life. Lukacs showed that there was a correspondence between the economic forms of the society, the cultural forms, the forms of expression and its literary forms.

Lukacs states that objectification of all aspects of production, its alienation from producers, the reification of social relations, the quantification and depersonalization of culture and the rational calculation of the bureaucracy create systems of relations that seem to operate by their own laws. Individuals are subjects of these systems.

Lukacs states that knowledge of objective reality is possible, but only if it goes beyond the reflection of immediate reality. The subject has an active role in constructing the knowledge of real world and in transforming objective circumstances.
For Luckas, creative work is the only means to overcome alienation from themselves, from their world and from other people. The critic’s role is merely to reveal the real meaning of a literary work. The critic must use literature to ask ultimate question about life.

According to Lukacs, modern capitalist society is riven by contradictions between universal and particular, intelligible and sensible, part and whole. The realist artist expresses a vision of the possible totality embracing these contradictions, a totality achieved by embodying what is typical about various historical stages. For example, an individual character might enshrine an entire complex of history forces.

Lukacs confronts the enormous task of constructing a Marxist aesthetic. This is a task which involves viewing the aesthetic contextually as one mode of reflecting reality among others and elaborating the specific traits of the aesthetic mode, which expresses objectivity as conjoined with peculiarity of subjective conditions and genesis. This helps in understanding art as another form of man making himself through his work. It is the articulation of a genuinely dialectical and historical method as well as of the historical nature of objective reality itself. It stresses the connections between Marxism and other traditions of thought; clarifying the opposition between idealist and materialist aesthetics as well as the historical and ideological relations between immanence and transcendence. He is the profoundest philosopher that Marxism has yet produced.

Italian Marxist theorist and political activist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), whose main contribution to Marxism is widely thought to, lie in his elaboration of the notion of hegemony. Gramsci has been a major influence on literary theory especially after the English translation of his Prison Notebooks appeared in 1971. Gramsci adopted certain fundamental categories for his analysis of culture and society: hegemony, ideology and division between state and civil society.

For Gramsci, culture is neither a simple reflection of the economic base nor a separate entity. Instead he argues that the relationship between the base and superstructure is one of reciprocity. This means that Gramsci rejects the passive role of the reflected culture for that of an active dynamic condition. Gramsci levels three ‘isms’ against traditional Marxist theory. First is instrumentalism. Since traditional Marxism regards the state as instrument of a dominant class and thereby denies the state any autonomy of its own. According to Gramsci, the Marxist notion of inevitable stages of history gave rise to political passivity. Second is reductionism, as the concept of politics as a superstructure, an epiphenomenon derived from an economic base. This smothers the role of state in the society. Third is catastrophism. The
assumption that relations between bourgeois and proletariat will increasingly polarize, as the inevitable consequence of the capitalist crisis. This makes the need/idea of intervention unnecessary.

Gramsci’s notion of ideology suggests that man acquires consciousness of structural conflicts on the level of ideologies. That is revolutions are facilitated by shifts in the economic structure and their outcomes are decided on the level of ideologies. Ideology is thus the site of class conflict for Gramsci. Gramcian notion of ideology can be well understood with his idea of hegemony. Gramsci redefines ideology by emphasizing the institutional and cultural base of ideology. Ideology may be of any form: political propaganda, sermons, folklore and popular songs. Ideology is not false consciousness, simply because, for Gramsci, popular songs and superstitions are themselves material forces. Ideology is an object of interpretation. The purpose of a philosophy of praxis is to uncover the roots of the development of the current ideologies. It must treat class conflict as much at the level of ideas as at the level of economic areas. This is better understood in Gramsci’s idea of historical bloc.

Gramsci states that dominant classes maintain their position not only through acts of coercion but also through symbolic action which renews and recreates the social order. Hegemony is the nexus of material and ideological instruments through which the dominant classes maintain their power. Hegemony thus mediates between the ruling ideas and the subjects. The hegemony of the ruling/dominant class is maintained through coercion and consent. The material sphere is a structure that is allied with a superstructure of ideas. These ideas are institutionalized in the civil society as the law courts, the bureaucracy, and the religious and educational system. The coercive apparatus involves army and police apparatus.

A more subtle form of control is to employ intellectuals to naturalize the present, oppressive order. The ruled must be made to accept the things as they are i.e. accept and consent to oppression of their own volition because they are convinced of the legitimacy of the order. In Swami and Friends, we will see that how dominant ideology of the British is thrust upon the students. The so-called liberal bourgeois education institution acts as a centre of power, harassing and repressing the pupils and a site for the ideological struggle.

Gramsci states that autonomous revolutionary potential on the part of the proletariat could only be realized through political and intellectual autonomy.
The transformation to a capitalist state cannot be successful without the proletariat’s own intellectuals forging an alternative hegemony. The notion of hegemony is effectively a metonymic affirmation of the dialectical connection between economic super structural spheres. It stresses the transformative role of human agency, rather than relying on the inevitability of economic determinism.

Gramsci is also certain that there will be a decisive change in man’s consciousness. For Gramsci, the schools and courts function as repressive sites, and the courts, are the most important state activities in the development of ideologies.

Gramsci argued that intellectuals are people in whom the philosophical instinct is better developed than others. There are two kinds of intellectuals. The organic types are those who are needed by the new class to develop a new social order. Traditional intellectuals are those who remain tied to earlier historical period. Both types help to construct a cultural-social unity that forms the basis of a historical bloc. A historical bloc represents a unification of various groups with differing interests, but who remain united under the leadership of party. The party thus has a cultural function too. The political party is the first cell for the development of hegemony. It is the mechanism which carries out in civil society the same function as the state carries out in political party.

Gramsci states that literature participates in the struggle for hegemony in society. It may help counter oppressive hegemony by suggesting and popularizing new ones. The organic intellectuals play an important part here.

In Anglo-American world a cultural materialist criticism was first reviewed by Raymond Williams’ work, notably Culture and Society 1780-1950, which analyzes the cultural critique of capitalism in English literary tradition. Williams rejected a simplistic explanation of culture as the efflux of material conditions but stressed the contribution of cultural forms to economic and political development. Williams work became overtly Marxist with the publication in 1977 of Marxism and Literature. In this work, Williams undertook a critical review of earlier Marxist theories and offered his own analysis of fundamental Marxist notions such as ideology, hegemony, base and superstructure. His own cultural materialism attempts to integrate Marxist conceptions of language and literature. Keywords (1976) examine the history of language, the role of the media, mass communications, and the cultural connections between the country and the city. Williams shifted the basis of criticism from purely textual exercise to the material world.
Williams argued that the key moments which should be of interest to Marxism are the emphasis on language as activity, emphasis on the history of language. Williams stresses the connection and interaction between social and historical processes. Active meaning and values are embodied within language, and, in turn, the changing patterns and meanings in language exert a social force. The changes and conflicts of a whole way of life are deeply implicated in that culture’s systems of learning and communication.

The opponents of Marxism see it as reductive and deterministic. Williams argues that within Marxism the only objective conditions are and can only be the result of human actions in the material world. The real distinction can only be between historical objectivity (the conditions into which at any particular point in time men find themselves born, the accessible conditions into which they enter) and abstract objectivity (where the determining process is independent of their will because they cannot control), they can only try and understand it and modify their actions accordingly.

For Williams, society or historical events cannot be categorically abstracted from individuals and individual wills. Such a separation leads to an alienated objectivist society working unconsciously. The individual or genotype then becomes positive extra-social force.

Determination is the recognition of multiple forces rather than the isolated forces of modes or techniques of production. The social and political order, which maintains a capitalist market, like the social and political struggle that created it, is necessarily a material production. If the real world is material, it can be seen in its constitutive forms. Any reflection of these will be of material reality. Thus the mind of artist must be seen as materially conditioned.

William explains hegemony such as that the whole social problem may be related to specific distribution of power and influence. The sense of an ideology is applied to the actual consciousness of both the dominant and subordinated classes. The dominant class has this ideology in pure and simple forms. A subordinated class has nothing but this ideology in its consciousness, or rather, the ideology imposed upon its consciousness. Hegemony constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society; it saturates their very consciousness. Williams elaborates the meaning of hegemony in Culture and Materialism as:

It is whole body of practices and expectations.... It is a set of meanings and values which as they experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus continues a sense of reality for most people in the society, a
sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. But this is not … in any sense a static system (38).

Marxist cultural theory has two basic propositions. First is the determining base and determined superstructure. Second is social being determines consciousness. Superstructure is ideology and culture, which imitates the reality of economic base.

However, sometimes direct connections cannot be found between the base and superstructure. In order to explain this, Williams develops the notion of ‘lags’. There are lags in time, which cause the distancing of some aspects of culture from economic activities. There is also mediation between base and superstructures, but not a direct reflection. There are homologous structures, which can be made visible only after analysis.

The base should be regarded as “a process not a state” (Williams, *Culture and Materialism* 34). The base is not merely the basic industry, but should also refer to men producing themselves, reproduction in real life and primary production, material production. Totality of base and superstructure refers to the entire realm of social practices. Art and thought which have all along been thought of as natural and universal actually ratify the dominant ideology. Williams argues that neither the notion of literature as above material conditions nor as truly reflection them is relevant. The theory of culture is the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. We need to look at a felt sense of the equality of life at a particular place and time, a sense of the ways in which particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living. This particular sense of place and particular community of experience, a structured social experience, is what Williams famously termed structure of feeling.

In the *Marxism and Literature*, Williams states that ideology is incorporated through educational institutes and the family. A selective tradition passed off as the tradition. In *Swami and Friends*, we will observe incorporation of the bourgeois ideology through the educational institutes. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, tradition and ideology are incorporated through family.

Williams proposes a three tier model here- oppositional culture or alternative culture that resists dominant culture; residual culture which is of some previous culture or social formation. Some of the dominant cultures also survive through this residual culture. In emergent culture new values are being suggested. No dominant culture or mode of production
exhausts all human possibilities. Some new ideas may be incorporated by dominant ideology, or else discarded. What the dominant class discards may be accepted by the new classes. Or, these subcultures may decode dominant meanings in their own way, and incorporate them in their own style.

Culture, for Raymond Williams, is not something monolithic whole, but it refers to classes in a class society. Williams remarks in his Marxism and Literature: “In a class society there are primarily inequalities between classes. Gramsci therefore introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognized as a whole process” (108).

All contemporary literary theory is a theory of consumption, especially symbolized in terms like taste and sensibility. Art is a practice. We have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions. We have to look for the processes of transformation or mediations that the components have gone through. Art and society should be compared with the whole complex of human actions and feelings. Culture, for instance, must be analyzed in terms of class, industry, democracy and art. Culture/art must be treated as social uses of the material means of production. The focus is on the social organization of culture, as a realized signifying system, embedded in a whole range of activities, relations and institutions of which only some are manifestly cultural.

Thus conceptual terms like creativity, culture, individual, society and the institutions/instituted forms such as literacy, the press, education, standardization of the language, the convention of drama and fiction, must be situated within network of active social relations that bestow meaning to these terms. Tradition, according to Williams, is always a selective tradition passed off as the tradition. This is always being remade, with a continuous selection and re-selection, interpretation. All this is what constitutes critical activity.

Terry Eagleton’s numerous writings are wide ranging. His Marxist works like Criticism and Ideology (1976), Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976), Ideology (1991), The Function of Criticism (1994), The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990) and his popular Literary Theory: An introduction (1983) has been extremely influential.

Eagleton’s position entails not compromise but a strategy which is compatible with his Marxism. From one point of view, virtually all modern literary theories, each with its own inflections and motives, can be regarded as an implicit if not direct reaction against the New
Critical claims as to the autonomy, independence and objectivity of a literary text. Eagleton has an ambivalent stance towards what he calls in *The Function of Literary Criticism* the “radical anti-objectivism” of recent theory (93). What this reaction against objectivity entails, at a deeper level is an assault on the notion of identity. It is perhaps at this level that one can see most clearly the nature of overlap and divergence between Eagleton’s Marxism and non-Marxist theory.

In traditional logic, the law of identity serves among other things as a basis of categorization and exclusive definition: an entity is what it is precisely because it is not anything else. Its identity is thus born in the process of diremg its relations with other similarly identified things in the world, a process which thereby denies ontical status to those relations, treating them as somehow external to the entities related. Thus suppression of relations and relegation of them to a contingent status, a procedure closely tied to Aristotle’s various definitions of substance and essence, can serve a political and ideological function. As Eagleton remarks in essay on Adorno, in *The Function of Criticism*, the notion of identity is coercive. It is the ideological element of pure thought and was installed at the heart of Enlightenment reason. It is installed also in all philosophies which positivistically accept the apparent givenness of an object at face value, failing to see the object as essentially the result of a process whether philosophical or political.

Eagleton has never denied the dialectical character of Marxism. Eagleton argues that the intention of Marxist criticism is not to discuss the insights of, say, stylistic, psychoanalytic or even straight empiricist criticism but to establish a hierarchy among these alternative methods, and in doing so, constitute itself as that hierarchy’s determining base.

All imaginative production is social production. Literature designates a privileged order of values defined and realized within certain institutional discourses. The social is the matrix within which all other terms are fleshed and shaped. Eagleton argues that Marxist critics have tried to discover the synchrony of structure, thus enabling a deciphering of the outline of an informing structure of social consciousness in the aesthetics of text itself.

For Eagleton, a text presses up against frontiers of what can be said, thus exposing the ideological frontiers and following the critic to identify them. This means that a text in saying one thing reveals other possibilities which it is ideologically prohibited from realizing. The absences or silences in a text tie it to the history from which it is produced. Text in Eagleton’s view does not reflect historical reality; they work on ideology to convey an effect of the real. Ideology is thus defined by Eagleton as the system of representations (aesthetic, religious,
judicial) that shape the individual mental picture of lived experience. The meaning and perceptions of / in a text are a reworking of ideology’s own working of reality. That is to say, a text works at reality at two removes.

Eagleton says that we are not attending to the words on the page if we fail to grasp them as cryptic but revelatory signs of a real history. A work’s sensitivity to the typical developing dynamics of its history is a major constituent of its aesthetic worth. But this sensitivity may be locked in productive conflict with the conscious ideological stance of the author.

Eagleton opines that we need a dialectical criticism conscious of its historical roots and relations, and so capable of interrogating the limits of other critical methods which substitute their own synthetic totalities (such as myth, genre) for the founding totality of history itself. That is, against the traditional critical modes which replace the actual dynamics and contradictions of history with its all-encompassing categories like myth or genre, Marxist criticism reveals the fractured basis of tradition, form, and aesthetics. A practice of reading against the grain is necessary to produce a revolutionary criticism which connects with the practical activity of the truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.

Eagleton sums up the aims and agenda of Marxist criticism beautifully when he writes that the problem solving process of text is never merely a matter of its reference outward to certain pre-existing ideological cruxes. It is, rather a matter of the ideological presenting itself in the form of aesthetic and vice versa. Marxist criticism then seeks to understand the ideological significance whereby certain historical texts are served from their social formations, defined as literary, bound and ranked together to constitute a series of literary traditions and interrogated to yield a set of ideologically presupposed responses.

The public sphere in the realm of social institutions weld themselves together into relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of a powerful political force.

In his seminal work The Function of Criticism, Eagleton argues that modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of liberal, bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century. Literary discussion becomes an arena to pave the way for political discussion in the middle classes.
For Eagleton, culture is the negation of all particular forms in the name of the totality. This totality is thus a void because it is no more than a totality of negated, silenced and marginalized moments.

The moment of criticism’s institutionalization is also the moment of its demise as a socially active force. The role of the contemporary critic is to resist the domination of the late capitalist mode by reconnecting the symbolic to political. We need to engage with those repressed needs, interests and desires which may then emerge as cultural forms with their own collective force. If modern criticism was born of a struggle against the Absolutist State, its future should now be defined as a struggle against the bourgeois state. It must break with its ideological prehistory and become a science. Eagleton says that the guarantor of a scientific criticism is the science of ideological formations.

Eagleton accepts the potential of deconstruction and post structuralism to undermine absolute forms of knowledge and all certainties. However, deconstruction for Eagleton denies objectivity and the material interests.

Study of Marxism and contribution of major Marxist critics of stature of George Lukas, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton to the development of Marxist critical standards and Marxist aesthetics will help us to understand R.K. Narayan in a new perspective.
WORKS CITED


---. *Keywords: A vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Peter Owen, 1975. Print.