CHAPTER TWO

CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF LITERARY HISTORY

I

The writing of literary history and the writing of general history emerged more or less simultaneously during the late seventeenth century in the west. The reasons for the emergence in the two cases were, however, different.

The writing of history developed as a result of a philosophy of history which came about on account of a break with the past which in turn was the result of industrialization. According to Rene Wellek, "The historical sense which can be described as a recognition of individuality in its historical setting and an appreciation of the historical process into which individualities fit."[1] developed towards the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century.

> Under the influence of cartesianism, philosophical interest had begun to shift from the cosmological problem to the problem of consciousness and its growth. The problem of knowledge was to become the central concern of English philosophy from Locke onwards. Religious individualism led to increased emphasis on personal experience. In political life, the growing respect for the rights of the individual points at least, theoretically, to liberalism. In ethics, concepts like the 'moral sense' or Butler's 'conscience' show the same trend towards subjectivist standards.[2]

Literary history became possible when the concepts of individuality of writers and development came to be emphasized. Both concepts are complementary. There can be no understanding of historical individuality without the knowledge of its development. And there cannot be a historical development without a series of individualities. The individuality of the writer came to be emphasized more and more towards the end of the seventeenth century. and the beginning of the eighteenth century.. The national traits of one literary tradition began to be stressed in opposition to another. One type of drama was contrasted with another. The individuality of different ages was recognized. The term 'the spirit of the age' was used in connection with the analysis of the peculiar characteristics of each successive period in history. Literature was contextualized in terms of environment. People began to discuss the influence of the social milieu and the intellectual climate on literature.

> Development... however, was the main concept which made literary history possible. Before the 17thc, with a few exceptions, Greece and Rome were considered as being on the same plane as contemporary England. Virgil and Ovid, Homer and Pindar, were discussed as almost contemporary writers.... The modern concept of development could arise only when the idea of independent, individual, national literatures had become established and accepted.[3]

Literary history involves some special difficulties which the writing of general history is not faced with. History deals with events from the past, which the historian does not have direct access to, and yet these events are fixed in time. A literary work is accessible only through a time sequence. It does not

remain unchanged through the course of history. It changes as it passes through the minds of readers, critics and creative writers over the ages. Events in general history are well-defined whereas events in literary history are continually shifting as they are being re-defined by the test of the historian.

The terms 'history' and 'historiography' have fallen in and out of favour so often with literary critics that eminent historians/ scholar critics like Rene Wellek, R.S. Crane and David Perkins have been led to ask the question - Is it possible to write a literary history? And each of them has gone on to answer this question in his own way but agreed on one vital issue that although it is not possible for any historian to write a complete and wholly satisfactory literary history, historiography has a prominent place in the larger context of literary scholarship and its worth as a field of study cannot be questioned.

The antipathy for history has several causes. The value of history which had once been universally acknowledged, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been gradually replaced by the feeling that the society has no need for history for solving its problems. Therefore the interpretation and evaluation of the past is considered an unproductive venture. Those who believe that the past has no bearing either on the present or the future, have advocated the need to live without history as the following remarks of Jan Corstius will indicate.

> The present feeling that history is of little or no use to modern man, has, I think, much to do with the rapid and radical changes in the social, moral, philosophical, and religious thought of our time and their effects on education,

teaching, and scholarship, as shown by the dazzling succession of problems posited and dropped, theories thrown out and exploded, methods proposed and rendered out of date. This embarrassing atmosphere of thought and action favours reasoning and decisions which are based rather upon feeling and sentiment than upon reflection. The same effect is produced by the intricacy and opaqueness of so many questions, that it becomes impossible to cover the whole range of relevant data. What may be, in this situation, the meaning of the study of history ? Surely one answer to this question will be that the present turns so quickly into a past dead and buried and is in itself so despicable that only a future matters which has to be protected from any contagion by history[4]

Corstius believes that the unhistorical approach towards the study of literature has been mainly fostered by new criticism and structuralism. The structuralists, according to him, have formed an alliance with \neo-Marxists in their condemnation and rejection of literary history. Literary history is relegated to the area of sociology and literary study comes to be seen as the study of language, i.e. poetic language, which in terms of Marxist ideology is considered a means by which capitalist society manipulates the reader in order to maintain him as a member of the bourgeosie.

The depreciation of literary history, states Corstius, has gone hand in hand with an increase of literary theory. This shifting of scholarly interest has a direct relation to the reaction against an historical approach to the study of literature.

Literary theory now claims to dispense with literary history.

> It often proclaims the universality and timelessness of its principles and classifications without having tried the latter in material taken from as many periods and literatures as possible. Consequently it makes those principles and classifications operative in the analyses of texts irrespective of the period to which that material belongs. Thus it strips a piece of literature of certain relationships relevant to our undersanding of the text and reduces its essentials to a mere skeleton.[5]

However, the poet's individuality in using language, forms, techniques and devices, as part of a literary tradition, have been handed down to him from the past and these, in turn, are influenced by the literary modes and conventions, perspectives and aspirations, theories and experiments of the time. The reader cannot fully grasp what happens at the conception of a poem or a novel without the knowledge of the literary thought of the time and its subsequent practice. Ultimately literary evaluation cannot subsist without literary history.

> This is the more evident if the typical literary context is concerned in the comparison. And that will often be the case, for the observation of the various individual realizations, in the course of time, of literary types, themes, motifs, formulae, symbols, figures of speech, versification etc. and their possible historical inter-relationship has in itself an evaluative tenor and, at the same time, places the evaluation on the firm footing of the comparative method. Many a text has its roots in strong literary traditions, especially those of genre and theme, so that only a trained knowledge of these historical phenomena enables us to evaluate its individual quali-

ties. This holds true of texts of all centuries, our age not excepted. The making of literature is like a game of chess. The good performance is carried out according to traditional rules and shines out as quite new and unique.[6]

Critics should, therefore, engage themselves in close studies of histories of literature that have already been written, consider the principles of literary history that have been formulated and incorporate up-coming theories regarding the writing of literary history instead of getting involved in futile speculations regarding the ultimate value of literary history.

II

Wellek's Contribution To Historiography

Rene Wellek may be regarded as the first historian of literary history. In works as varied as *The Rise of English Literary History*, *Concepts of Criticism*, *Discriminations*, *The Theory of Literature, Criticism and History,* he has sought to define what legitimately falls under the category of literary history and tackle with the difficulties of writing literary history. Earlier on, in an essay entitled *Literary History and Literary Theory,* he distinguishes literary history from literary theory and literary criticism, though he admits there is overlapping amongst the three areas. He describes literary theory as the study of the principles and criteria of literature and states that literary history and literary criticism involve the study of the concrete literary works of art. He goes on to refute this distinction saying that the term criticism used to include literary theory and literary history and literary history has often been seen to include literary theory as well as literary criticism.

Literary history has to find a mean between the old relativism of the past which meant an exact reconstruction of the past and reliance on the standards and values of the then contemporaries and the new absolutism which advocates one eternal, unchanging standard for judging all literature.

> Clearly the standards of contemporaries cannot be binding on us, even if we could reconstruct them and find a common lowest denominater among their diversities. Nor can we simply divest ourselves of our individuality or the lessons we have learned from history. Asking us to interpret *Hamlet* only in terms of what the very hypothetical views of Shakespeare or his audience were, is asking us to forget three hundred years of history. But again this history itself, however instructive, cannot be binding on us: its authority is open to the same objection as the authority of the author's contemporaries. There is simply no way of avoiding judgment by us, by myself. Even the 'verdict of the ages' is only the accumulated judgment of other readers, critics, viewers and even professors. The only truthful and right thing to do is to make this judgment as objective as possible, to do what every scientist and scholar does: to isolate his subject, in our case, the literary work of art, to contemplate it intently, to analyze, to interpret and finally to evaluate it by criteria derived from, buttressed by as wide a knowledge, as close an observation, as keen a sensibility, as honest a judgment as we can command.[7]

Wellek examines terms such as the 'development' or 'evolution' of literature, which literary history is supposed to deal with and discusses the difficulties represented by the use of these terms.

Tracing the development of literary works by arranging them in groups on the basis of common authorship, genres, stylistic types, themes or literary traditions is an extraordinarily difficult task. Critics, he says, have sought a way around this problem by denying the existence of a continuity amongst literary works.

> Extreme 'personalism' of this sort must lead to the view that every individual work of art is completely isolated, and incomprehensible. We must conceive rather of literature as a whole system of works which is, with the accretion of new ones, constantly changing its relationships, growing as a changing whole.[8]

The term evolution has been derived from biology and according to Wellek, it can be used in the biological sense in two different ways: One kind of evolution is represented by growth as from an egg to a bird. The other implies development as that of the brain of a fish to the brain of a man. Historians have traced the evolution of literature in both the ways. The first concept which traces the birth, growth and decay of literary genres has been tinkered with and discarded. The second concept has found favour with most historians. These historians trace the evolution of literature with a specific goal in mind such as the growth of a concept or a genre, the discovery of the influences of other writers, periodization and canonization. Literary histories are then shown to evolve towards a realization of these goals. Thus there are histories which trace the growth of a certain common trait in literary works, such as imagery, themes and motifs. There are histories which trace the growth of literary genres such as the lyric, the epic, the novel. And finally there are histories which trace the development of 'periods' or 'movements'.

The difficulties involved in writing any of such histories are

manifold. For instance, while tracing the influences of authors on one another, it is easy to fall into making facile generalizations, drawing fatuous and far-fetched parallels. Similarly, writing a literary history based on the growth of a certain isolated trait such as poetic diction or imagery or themes or motifs would demand a considerable clarity of the concept in hand and even then such a history would appear forced and stilted. Wellek looks upon the history of literary genres as 'one of the most promising areas for the study of history'. He cites W. W. Greg's *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* and C. S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love* as excellent examples of good genre histories. The writer of such histories would have to bear certain injunctions very clearly in his mind.

> Though the genre will appear in the history exemplified in the individual works, it will not be described by all traits of these individual works: we must conceive of genre as a 'regulative' concept, some underlying pattern, a convention which is real, i.e. effective because it actually moulds the writing of concrete works. The history never needs to reach a specific aim in the sense that there cannot be any further continuation or differentiation of a genre, but, in order to write a proper history, we shall have to keep in mind some temporal aim or type.[9]

The history of a period or a movement raises several questions: how does one form 'periods'? ; does the term 'period' mean an arbitrary label which can be superimposed upon any section of time?; how does one divide time? Historians have been extremely vague and arbitrary when drawing up periods. Some have relied on calender dates; some on political events such as the reigns of different rulers.

....the motley derivation of our current labels is somewhat disconcerting. 'Reformation' comes from ecclesiastical history; 'Humanism', mainly from the history of scholarship; 'Renaissance' from art history; 'Commonwealth' and 'Restoration' from definite political events. The term 'eighteenth' century is an old numerical term which has assumed some of the functions of literary terms such as 'Augustan' and 'Neo-classic'. 'Pre-Romanticism' and 'Romanticism' are primarily literary terms, while Victorian, Edwardian and Georgian are derived from the reigns of the sovereigns.[10]

Wellek emphasizes the need for greater flexibility while defining periods. There cannot be cut-and-dried notions about the division of periods. Though one must rescue the description of periods from the weller of political, literary and artistic labels into which they have fallen, one must realize that a 'period' is not a class or a group under which all literary works neatly fall. An individual literary work goes to make up a class, a part of a whole, it is not defined or restricted by the whole.

The historian who is involved in tracing the changes that come about from one period to another, has to provide explanations for these changes. One explanation offered is the exhaustion of old ideas, old norms. The old system reaches a saturation point beyond which it cannot stretch, and therefore, a new code comes into being. And thus the cycle continues.

Another explanation given by historians is in the form of the rise of a new generation. Mere generational change, however, cannot explain literary changes. Wellek finally concludes,

After all, we are only beginning to learn how to analyse a

> work of art in its integrity; we are still very clumsy in our methods, and their basis in theory is still constantly shifting. Thus, much is before us. Nor is there anything to regret in the fact that literary history projects a future as well as a past, a future which cannot and should not consist merely in the filling of gaps in the scheme discovered by older methods. We must seek to elaborate a new ideal of literary history and new methods which would make its realization possible. If the ideal here outlined seems unduly 'purist' in its emphasis on the history of literature as an art, we can avow that no other approach has been considered invalid and that concentration seems a necessary antidote to the expansionist movement through which literary history has passed in the last decades. A clear consciousness of a scheme of relationships between methods is in itself a remedy against mental confusion, even though the individual may elect to combine several methods.[11]

Wellek laid the way for latter-day historians, who have confirmed his views on the possible varieties of combinations of the methods of historiography. R. S. Crane has given us a very comprehensive outline for the writing of literary history in his *Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History*. In this essay he examines the critical elements which serve to make up the material of literary history, the principles of organization involved in arranging this material and the principles of explanation which inquire into the immediate and remote causes of literary works.

III

Crane On Principles Of Literary History

The critical elements of literary history are obviously authors and their works. These can be studied philologically (in the manner of the grammarian) or dialectically. The philological approach would involve textual and critical analysis, grammar and bibliography. The dialectical approach involves drawing dialectical schematisms, analogues. Crane says that all critical theories ranging from Aristotle's have dealt with "the universally predictable qualities of literature as selected and ordered by some scheme of dialectical oppositions and resolutions."[12]

These dialectical contraries may be drawn from various types of discourse - "ethical, political, sociological, historical, physiological, psychological, psychoanalytical, medical, metaphysical, epistemological, logical, grammatical, rhetorical, semantic.[13]

This system can be used in various ways, for the selection and organization of authors and their works, for describing literary genres, literary traditions, themes and styles. Apart from these two broad-based approaches to the material of literary history, there is yet another approach which is basically concerned with the constructional aspect of literature, the artistic synthesis within the literary works. The artistic synthesis refers to the synthesis of the parts of a work into a whole, the effect of which depends upon the medium chosen by the writer, the subject and the manner of his presentation. The historian who proposes to deal with works of art in terms of the concept of artistic synthesis must achieve artistic particularity and relevance in his statements about traits of works or groups of works, and do justice to the whole work as

well as its parts. He should, in addition, make note of the author's paraphernalia - his experience, his mind, his awareness and the bearings they have on his works.

The next step is the organizing of all these diverse material. The authors and their works are placed in succession in terms of likeness and difference. Some historians prefer to deal with each of the authors individually without attempting to show continuity. But, on the whole, most historians prefer to classify authors on the basis of some criteria such as genre or professional, political, social or ideological affinities, tradition, period or movement.

Out of these general principles, the history then develops as organic literary history or narrative literary history. Organic literary history involves the application of single dialectic to authors and linking their works to a single line of development. Several historians, says Crane, such as Emile Legouis, W.J. Courthope *(History of English Poetry)*. L.C. Knights *(Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson)*. Sir Herbert Grierson *(Cross-currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century)* have employed this method.

> The necessity present in such histories derives typically from the assumption that literary works must inevitably be mirrors of their age as well as, more immediately, of their authors' experiences and minds. This assumption underlies also another group of modern literary histories, which differ, however, from those just considered by introducing another level of necessity - and hence of schematic integration - in the form of a dialectical analysis of the underlying causal factors. The primary determinant sometimes been the economic or political structure of the society, as in the many attempts to write the history of litera-

ture in terms of Marxist theory or some variant thereof.[14]

In a narrative literary history, the historian concerns himself with change. Now this change could be related to (1) subject matter, myth or body of doctrine which writers frequently employ (2) technique (3) model or models that writers draw upon (4) a particular genre (5) a specific literary practice or convention (6) the use of language. While drawing the continuum of change with respect to any of these themes the historian would have to identify the initial state before the change and show the emergence of the latter state through the process of change and name the causes for the change.

> It is evident that here again, as in organic literary history, we have moved beyond the simple principles of succession and of likeness and difference, though without ceasing to employ these as guides in the ordering and interpretation of data. The structure of a narrative history, like that of an organic history, is continuous and dynamic rather than atomistic and static, and its constituent elements, like those of an organic history, are related to one another as contraries or opposites.[15]

This mode of literary history could be further refined by an emphasis on the constructional causes of literature - such as the causes behind the use of certain forms, subject-matter, techniques.

> The crucial problem, then, is the discrimination of the various artistic ends pursued by writers from time to time and the organization of these differences into significant lines of change. We need only recall here what has been said earlier about the first part of the task: it is not a question

> either of classifying works grammatically in terms of their conventional genres or of schematizing them dialectically in terms of a predetermined pattern of rational oppositions to which their differing characteristics are reduced; rather it is a question of distinguishing with adequate precision, in terms of the constructive principles operative in each, the generic and specific natures of the concrete wholes which writers, for one reason or another, chose to produce, and of doing this in such a fashion as clearly to indicate, for any group of works thus differentiated, the peculiar formal requirements which require the choice of this principle rather than of some other, in the shaping of the material, imposed upon their writers. And the problem is solved, we may also recall, when the historian is able to say, for any work distinguished thus and so in medium and manner, that its principal part is an organization of such and such specific elements of action, character, thought or emotion, accomplished in such and such a way, and endowed consequently with the power of inducing in attentive and perceptive readers such and and such a sequence of special effects.[16]

An inquiry into the immediate and remote causes of literary history finally brings us to the principles of explanation without which no literary history can subsist. The material which the historian organizes around a concept or a dialectic in the form of a narrative has got to be explained in terms of causes. These causes are mainly of two types: the pre-constructional causes and the constructional causes.

Some historians explain the changes in literary history through changes in diction, relations of the author with his contemporary

audience or the history of another field such as religion, anthropology, class struggle, philosophy etc. In such cases the link between cause and effect cannot be directly established. The inquiry is into general causes such as the national character, the spirit of the age, the movement of a society, significant 'moments' of evolution and so on.

> Authors of such histories rarely introduce any mediating causal steps between the integrating principle and the peculiarities of content and form exhibited by the works it purports to explain. The result is that we are never given the sufficient causes of literary works considered as concrete objects or events (if we are given causes at all) but only the conditions sine qua non of the presence in some works and the absence from others of certain combinations of general traits.[17]

Most histories are based upon such analogues or premises of interrelations of varied fields.

However, the historian who is interested in preserving the individuality of literary works would have to make a close inquiry into their constructional causes such as the causes of the use of specific forms, techniques, material and their effect upon the resultant works of art. He would then have to show how the choice of form, subject-matter and technique is related to their previous employment in earlier literature and how much of it is dictated by the demands of the readers, the critics and the publishers. Finally he would have to look for causes in the material circumstances surrounding the production of literary works. Thus the historian has to identify specific causes and collective

causes to explain the literary works.

Crane works at historiography from within the range of philosophical concerns associated with New criticism. New criticism was, in its early days extremely hostile to history. Crane, therefore, tries to persuade us that literary history is in truth an extension of literary criticism. And therefore the 'principles' of literary history are rather aesthetic principles than sociological ones.

IV

David Perkins On The Principles Of Literary History

David Perkins, a disciple of Crane, has enlarged upon the same principles, with an added emphasis on recent theories such as the aesthetics of reception as advocated by Hans Robert Jauss.

The aesthetics of reception demands a history of the reception of texts by readers Jauss puts forward the concept of the 'horizon of expectations' of readers and claims that a literary history should reveal how this horizon is met, challenged and revised by the production of new texts. A new horizon is formed every time a new text that questions it comes into being. The basic thrust of this theory is that it is the readers who decide the interpretations, evaluations and the ultimate value of texts. Therefore, a literary history if it is to possess any credibility, should be written from the readers' point of view. Jauss's theory, as Perkins himself points out, fails to take into consideration the differences in the horizons of expectations caused by sociological factors such as ' race, class, gender.

> If he paid attention to these sociological variables, he would confront too many different horizons of expectation, especially,

with the spread of literacy in the modern period. The more horizons we discriminate, the less they blend into one. Thus, Jauss's theory tends to ground the coherence of a past age at the expense of real heterogeneity. Every theorist of literary history - every practical attempt in the genre - ultimately shatters on this dilemma. We must perceive a past age as relatively unified if we are to write literary history. We must perceive it as highly diverse if what we write is to represent it plausibly.[18]

Perkins distinguishes between two types of literary history: narrative literary history and encyclopaedic literary hisory. The narrative form of literary history is traditional and the encyclopaedic form is post-modern in nature.

Encyclopaedic literary history consists of a series of different essays on authors, their works or groups of authors. This kind of literary history makes no pretence of representing 'continuity' or 'development'. It treats each author individually, without attempting to inter-relate him with other authors. The writer of such a history has a free and wide scope. He can mix biography, bibliography, criticism, intellectual and social history with impunity. Since an encyclopaedic history does not demand a single narrative as the only legitimate narrative, the historian can afford to digress and present the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the past through several points of view. Despite these advantages, encyclopaedic form of literary history is not really history.

Encyclopaedic form is intellectually deficient. Its explanations of past happenings are piecemeal, may be inconsistent with each other, and are admitted to be inadequate. It precludes a total vision of its subject. Because it aspires to reflect the

past in its fullness and heterogeneity, it does not organize the past, and in this sense is not history. There is little excitement in reading it.[19]

Like Crane, Perkins too, distinguishes yet another form of history - conceptual history. Conceptual history involves an inter-relation of authors and texts on the basis of a shared concept, such as 'the Age of Reason' or 'Romanticism' or even the idea of 'the Spirit of the Age'. Such histories look upon literature as a collective entity. Varied texts are integrated under one concept of one period. When several periods are covered, each integrated period succeeds the other under different 'concepts' and these concepts are shown to have an interconnection. These concepts are in themselves quite interesting and afford fresh insights into the past. But this form of history also has serious disadvantages.

> Any conceptual scheme highlights only those texts that fit its concepts, sees in texts only what its concepts reflect, and inevitably fall short of the multiplicity, diversity and ambiguity of the past... To put it another way, any conceptual scheme can be undermined by positivistic citations of particular fact. And, of course, its concepts can always be criticized from the point of view of historical relativism. They have no validity transcending the time and place that produced them. Thus the dilemmas of encyclopaedic and conceptual history are opposite. The one cannot organize the past and make it intelligible; the other cannot render it credibly.[20]

According to Perkins, the narrative form of literary history is the most commonly used one. It traces and describes changes from one state of affairs to another, In this sense, it has a

well-defined plot, with a beginning, a middle and an end. The 'hero' of the narrative is 'a logical subject' such as a genre, a style, the reputation of an author. The possible plots are, broadly speaking, three: rise, decline, rise and decline. Furthermore

> These plots can be treated in different modes. For example, the 'rise of the novel' might be epic, romance or comedy. And the metaphors in which rise or decline can be expressed are extremely various: coming of age, gathering of forces, spring and autumn, oedipal rebellion, erotic seduction and fall, and so forth. Needless to say, the same happening can be viewed as rise or decline, depending on the perspective of the literary historian.[21]

It goes without saying that the historian is highly selective in choosing the events which go into the making of the plot. The personal desires, caprices of the historian play a major role in the writing of such histories. Therefore, such histories often seem arbitrary or one-sided.

Perkins substantiates his analyses of different types of histories with concrete examples, highlighting the strengths and limitations of each. He does not advocate a special case in favour of an exclusive use of them to the detriment of the others. He rounds up his discussion of literary history by returning to his original question - what are the functions of literary history? He concludes that literary history is successful in so far as it achieves its aim not merely of reconstructing the past but illuminating literary works, explaining how and why a literary work acquired its form and theme.

Historiography in the West has successfully met the challnges

offered by various literary theories - new criticism, structuralism, myth criticism all of which have sought to undermine the value of literary history. The movement known as 'New Historicism' has once again helped to swerve the tide in favour of literary history. Critics such as Ralph Cohen, Hans Robert Jauss, Geoffrey Hartmann, Robert Weimann, Stanley Fish, Michael Riffattere, Hayden White have offered fresh perspectives on the writing of literary history.

V

New Historicism

New Historicism came into being in 1988. The term was coined by Stephen Greenblatt. According to Greenblatt, it is not so much a theory of literary criticism as a textual practice. It is a method of reading, which grew out of the ferment of the theories of the seventies. Its basic tenet is that the past is embedded in 'texts'. It deals principally with the importance of local, political and social contexts for the understanding of literary texts. In fact, it advocates a type of cultural history, which emphasizes 'history from below,' and which chiefly derives influence from the work of Michael Foucault on the history of institutions, the history of sexuality and the history of subjectivity.

The practice of New Historicism has been mainly associated with two groups of critics, one related to studies of Romanticism (Marilyn Butler, Marjorie Herinson, Jerome Mcgann and David Simpson) and the other related to Renaissance studies (Jonathan Goldberg, Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose).

New Historicism is characterized by the following concepts/ principles:

(1) The fundamental units for analysis and interpretation in cultural history are not so much ideas as power relationships. The focus is on issues such as patronage, patriarchal authority, the role of political and social needs in shaping literary production and reception.

(2) The refusal to recognize hierarchies and differences within texts such as canonical/ non-canonical, documents / fictions.

(3) The assumption that different modes of discourse such as literature, art, philosophy, theology, law, architecture, choreography, costume, the various sciences are not autonomous; their boundaries are extremely permeable; the scholar can arrive at an understanding of the broader ideological code of one discourse only through an understanding of the codes governing all discourses.

(4) The final assumption of the New Historicists is that culture is an active force in history; it is in itself a narrative construction produced through power relations. Thus the distinction between text and context gets eroded. There is no background and no autonomous text. Text and context are both open to contestation and reconstruction.

'Old' or 'traditional' historicism such as the metaphysical version relating to Hegel's transcendental philosophy, adhered to a grand narrative. A poetic act was seen as a stage in the history of consciousness. New Historicism focusses attention on the multiple and contradictory functions of each historical event or poetic act within the structural ensemble of cultural practices.

The most pervasive influence on the New Historicists is the work of Foucalt. His writings have shown how historical accounts are governed by the dominant ideology and how the dominant ideology manages to contain 'subversion' in the form of alternative discourses. Greenblatt, in particular, has taken up this line of reasoning in his Renaissance studies.

VI

The Aesthetics Of Reception And Reader Response Theory Of Literary History

The role of the reader has become specially prominent in contemporary literary theory. There are two main theories which concentrate on the reader and reading process: The first, which has been referred to earlier, is the 'Aesthetics of Reception'; it centres round the work of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. The second theory, known as the 'reader-response theory' is principally American in origin and includes the work of figures such as Norman Holland and David Bleich, working within the frame of psychology, Michael Riffattere, working within semiotics and Stanley Fish.

Hans Robert Jauss has argued that the literary text exists only as the collective interpretation of successive generations of readers. Every reader approaches a text with a particular 'horizon of expectations'. Jauss is deeply influenced by the tradition of hermeneutical philosophy, particularly the work of Hans Georg Gadamer who developed an aesthetic theory based on the philosophical ideas of Heidegger. Heidegger had laid emphasis on the 'givenness' of human existence and the inability to escape the 'historical' nature of the human condition. Gadamer believes that

reading is a process which attempts to bridge the gap between the past and the present. It is the present position of the interpreter which will influence how the past is inderstood and received. In trying to make sense of the past we can only know it in the light of the present cultural horizon. Jauss posits a 'horizon of expectations' which lays down the criteria in each historical period according to which people read and evaluate historical works. The horizon of expectations at the original historical moment of production only tells us how the work was received at the particular time. It does not establish an absolute or universal meaning of the text. The text has to be viewed through the 'horizon of expectations' of each successive generation of readers. Thus a 'fusion of horizons' is called for which would unite the past and the present. For Jauss, the meaning and value of the text is finally inseparable from the history of its reception.

> The way in which a literary work, at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value. The distance between the horizon of expectations and the work, between the familiarity of previous aesthetic experience and 'the horizontal change' demanded by the reception of the new work, determines the artistic character of a literary work, according to an aesthetics of reception: to the degree that this distance decreases, and no turn toward the horizon of yet-unknown experience is demanded of the receiving consciousness, the closer the work comes to the sphere of 'culinary' or entertainment art. This latter work can be characterized by an aesthetics of reception as not demanding

any horizontal change, but rather as precisely fulfilling the expectations prescribed by a ruling standard of taste, in that it satisfies the desire for the reproduction of the familiarly beautiful; confirms familiar sentiments; sanctions wishful notions; makes unusual experiences enjoyable as 'sensations', or even raises moral problems, but only to solve them in an edifying manner as predecided questions. If conversely, the artistic character of a work is to be measured by the aesthetic distance with which it opposes the expectations of its first audience, then it follows that this distance, at first experienced as a pleasing or alienating new perspective, can disappear for later readers, to the extent that the original negativity of the work has become self-evident and has itself entered into the horizon of future aesthetic experience, as a henceforth familiar expectation. The classical character of the so-called masterworks especially belongs to this second horizontal change; their beautiful form that has come self-evident, and their seemingly unquestionable 'eternal meaning' bring them, according to an aesthetics of reception, dangerously close to the irresistibly convincing and enjoyable 'culinary' art, so that it requires a special effort to read them 'against the grain' of the accustomed experience to catch sight of their artistic character once again.[22]

Wolfgang Iser is the most eclectic of the 'reception' theorists. He borrows concepts not only from phenomenology but also from Formalism, Semiotics, Gestalt psychology and so on. He focusses principally on the act of reading itself, on the gradual process by which a reader incorporates the various facets and levels of a text. Iser has been chiefly influenced by the work of Roman Ingarden, the disciple of Husserl, sharing his view of the text as

a totality made of several strata. According to Iser, the literary text does not merely represent objects, but relates to the world by presenting norms or value systems, several of which may be included in a single novel and embodied in particular characters. The text forces the reader to relate the norms to each other and to fill the gaps

Wolfgang Iser has outlined a Phenomenological approach to the reading of literary texts. The chief influence on Iser has been the work of the Phenomenologist aesthetician, Roman Ingarden who offers an insight into the various ways in which the literary text can be 'concretised.'

Iser concentrates on the act of reading itself.

> The Phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text... The text as such offers different 'schematized views' [Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische kuntwerks*__(Tubingen, 1960)] through which the subject matter of the work can come to light, but the actual bringing to light is an action of *konkretisation*. If this is so, then the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic, and the aesthetic : the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means

> independent of the individual disposition of the reader though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.[23]

One of Iser's most significant notions is the involvement of the reader in filling the unwritten gaps in the text. The meaning of literary texts is produced through the formation of what Iser terms as the 'gestalt' of texts. It is the reader who provides meaning to the texts, who 'formulates the unformulated' through the process of anticipation and retrospection. The reader co-relates the past, the present and the future in the text and forms a coherent whole. The meaning or 'the gestalt' of the text is inevitably influenced by the reader's own experience, consciousness and outlook.

The American critic, Stanley Fish goes one step ahead of Iser when he argues that the true writer of the text is the reader. He is not primarily concerned with the meaning of the text as interpreted by the reader but with what the text does to the reader. The text acts upon the reader with different effects. And what the text 'does' to the reader is, ultimately, what the reader 'does' to it. There is no 'objective' structure inherent in the text itself, waiting for an interpretation by the reader. The object of literary history, in other words is, not the text itself but a narration of the reader's developing responses to it.

Michael Riffattere has advanced a stylistic approach to literary history. He argues that the reader brings with him a linguistic

code which is different from the linguistic code in the text. The process of reading involves the clash of two different linguistic codes. The reader has to de-code what is encoded in the text, and this de-codation offers many difficulties. According to Riffattere, the task of literary history is to provide a 'meta-code' for such de-codation. Riffattere conceives of an 'ideal reader' who has the competence for reading the text in such a way that he is able to understand the original linguistic of the text which existed when it first appeared. He has suggested that literary history should concern itself with the problem of reconstructing the original significance of texts, the problem of 'the successive generations of readers, the assessment of literary influences and the relation of texts to trends and genres.'[24]

The influence of psychology is particularly evident in reader response criticism in the United States. Both Norman Holland and David Bleich have emphasized the psychology of the reader in their evaluation of the reading process. Holland speaks of an 'identity theme' which every individual possesses and which remains more or less constant during his lifetime. The reading process involves the assimilation of the text in terms of this theme.

> A reader responds to a literary wok by assimilating it to his own psychological processes, that is, to his search for successful solutions within his identity theme to the multiple demands, both inner and outer, on his ego[25]

The chief assumption of Bleich's 'Subjective criticism' is that the reading process is nothing but an attempt by the readers to understand themselves. It is the reader who transforms the text into a literary work through the process of symbolization and

re-symbolization. Therefore the interpretation of the text will ultimately depend on the reader's own personal response and psychological development.

Hayden White primarily concerns himself with the narrative aspect of history, chiefly the element of 'interpretation' involved in the narrative representation. He insists that 'interpretation' is unavoidable for the historian has to exclude certain facts which are not strictly relevant to his narration. At the same time he is also required to fill in the gaps in his material through interpretation.

> A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative.[26]

He distinguishes between 'meta-history' and proper history on the grounds that 'meta-history' provides philosophical speculations regarding history such as 'the riddle of history' whereas proper history has more modest aims: to explain what happened in the past through a precise and accurate reconstruction of the historical events. However, White himself admits that it is impossible to maintain this rigid distinction with regard to the nature of interpretation in historiography in general.

He quotes the examples of Hegel, Droysen, Nietzsche and Croce, all four of whom rejected the myth of objectivity and regarded interpretation as the soul of historiography. All the four theorists are agreed on this point and all of them stress the active, inventive aspect of the historian's inquiry into the past. For Droysen, interpretation was essential in order to make the historical

record complete. The historian had to construct an appropriate literary representation of the 'realities'.

Nietzsche stated that the real value of history lay not in a disclosure of facts but "in inventing ingenious variations on a probably commonplace theme, in raising the popular melody to a universal symbol and showing what a world of depth, power and beauty exists in it."[27] Both Hegel and Croce sought to equate the historian's insights to poetic insights, and firmly believed that history involved as much a 'making' of facts as the 'finding' of them.

Contemporary theorists have sought to either refute or support these views. Those who refute these views have tried to claim a scientific status for history, their argument being that the laws of causation governing historical events can be precisely identified and therefore 'interpretation' has no place in historiography. Another group of contemporary theorists maintains that hisotoriography involves narratives which are encoded in accordance with the story which lies within or behind the events recorded and these narrations are made in such a way that even a layman would be able to grasp them.

He cites the examples of Levi-Strauss, Northrop Frye and R.G. Collingwood, who have, in their separate ways, identified the element of 'construction' in history, which they choose to call myth. Levi-Strauss suggests that any historical narrative is nothing but 'a fraudulent outline' imposed by the historian upon a body of facts which can be referred to as data only in the loosest possible way. He goes onto say that history can never completely escape from the nature of myth. The interpretative aspect of historiography is essentially mythical in nature.

Northrop Frye's views bear a close resemblance to the ones just outlined. He believes that there is an element of 'myth' in history and that a historical interpretation can be said to apppeal to its readers in so far as it appeals to those 'pre-generic plot structures' or 'archetypal forms' which are provided by the literary art of the cultures to which they belong. Moreover, interpretation in history involves the provision of plot structures which may account for the 'story' behind the events outlined. This plotting may differ from historian to historian. What one historian may visualize and emplot as 'tragedy', another may emplot as 'comedy' or 'romance'. White gives the example of Michelet who emplots his history of France upto the time of the French Revolution as a 'romance' and Tocqueville who emplots the same period of history in the mode of tragedy.

Collingwood advances a similar idea in his analysis of historical interpretation in *The Idea of History*. He distinguishes between two interpretative strategies: critical and constructive. The critical strategy involves a rejection of certain kinds of facts in favour of a set of facts out of which a story is fashioned. It is here that the historian's constructive faculty comes into operation. No historical narrative can be produced without the excercise of the historian's 'constructive imagination'. This 'constructive imagination' extends to the form that a given set of events must have in order to make a story. What the historian must bring to his analysis of facts are general notions of the kinds of stories embedded in the facts. The types of stories that can be told about one and the same event may be legion.

Hayden White accepts the basic position that every narrative account has a plot structure. The historian attempts to narrate 'what

happened in the past' and explain 'why the events developed the way they did'. Historians bring different paradigms of the form that an explanation may take to their narration. By a paradigm, he means, the model of what a set of events will look like once it has been explained. Some historians concern themselves with discrete events as dispersed entities, others look upon the same events as integrated entities. He identifies four different methods of historiography which have been employed by historians over the years: 'the 'idiographic' method, the 'contextualist' method, the 'organicist' method and the 'mechanistic' method.

The 'idiographic' method involves an almost scientific sorting out of the given data and a precise and detailed explanation of each entity.

The 'contextualist' mode involves the placing of an 'event' within its context. The disparate entities are, in this case, integrated under a shared 'context'.

The 'organicist' method involves relating the various 'contexts' in the historical record as parts to the whole which is history-in-general. Explanation, for such a historian, must be a synthesis in which parts must be shown to mirror the totality of the structure.

The 'mechanistic' approach, on the other hand, involves a search for the laws of cause and effect. The historian, in this case, would have to identify causal agencies and their effects in his narrative.

White finally concludes that the choice of the plot-structure and the choice of mode of narration finally depends on the moral or ideological position of the historian (Anarchist, Conservative, Radical

or Liberal, as the case may be.)

> Interpretation thus enters into historiography in at least three ways: aesthetically (in the choice of a narrative strategy), epistemologically (in the choice of an explanatory paradigm) and ethically (in the choice of a strategy by which the ideological implications of a given representation can be drawn for the comprehension of current social problems).[28]

The critics discussed above have presented the complexity of the conceptual field which constitutes literary historiography. It would be desirable to bring some of their sophistication to our thinking about the history of Indian English fiction. Such an attempt has not been made so far.

VII

Having made this brief survey of western critical theories of historiography, the next logical step would be to examine the usefulness of these theories for writing the history of the Indian English novel.

Rene Wellek's observations regarding the sense of history and his analyses of certain key concepts in historiography provide significant guidelines for writing the history of the Indian English novel. Wellek's primary perception is that literary history became possible when the concepts of individuality of writers and development coalesced. In the case of the Indian English novel, the individuality of some of the novelists has already been emphasized by the major critics in this area. Srinivas - Iyengar, C. D. Narasihnmaiah, Meenakshi Mukherjee and William Walsh have made close studies of selected Indain English novelists and isolated their

individual traits. They have contextualized some of these novelists in terms of the social milieu and the political ethos. It is with the concept of development in this area that most of these critics find themselves treading on uncertain grounds.

The concept of evolution, as outlined by Wellek in his theory of historiography, would seem rather pre-mature and farstretched in application to the Indian English novel. One reason for the difficulty in tracing the 'development' or 'evolution' of this area of literatrure is the brief span of its existence. Secondly, tracing such an evolution in the manner suggested by Wellek, keeping in mind a specific goal such as the growth of the genre or the discovery of the influences of other writers, periodization or canonization presents incalculable problems. Some of these problems have been anticipated by Wellek himself.

He mentions that tracing the influences of writers on one another involves the dangers of trite generalizations and the drawing of absurd parallels. Similarly, a literary history in terms of periods or movements raises many questions regarding the divisions of such periods or movements, the criteria used for such divisions, the reliability of political and other extra-literary labels for naming these periods or movements. Wellek's main objection is that all works cannot and do not neatly fall into one period. An individual work cannot be forced into a definition by a period.

These injunctions are particularly relevant with regard to the history of the Indian English novel. The concepts of development, periodization and canonization present evident difficulties. Wellek's outline should warn the future historian of the Indian English novel against the pitfalls of a thoughtless appropriation of these

western methods.

Crane's description of the principles of literary history furnish an adequate criterion for histories of those areas of literature which have the benefit of a long span of existence. The circumstances surrounding the area of the Indian English novel do not permit an indiscriminate application of these principles as a whole.

Crane proposes two main methods for the selection of authors and their works in a literary history : the philological method which involves a close textual and critical analysis and the dialectical approach which would place the analysis of works in dialectical opposition to various discourses such as politics, sociology, history, philosophy, psychology and so forth. These methods of historiography appear ambitious and artificial in relation to the history of the Indian English novel at the present moment. An adequate passage of time which would give rise to further development and changes within this area, might admit the use of these methods for the future historian of the Indian English novel. In that case, a comprehensive organic or narrative literary history of this body of literature may emerge.

The third mode of literary history which Crane puts forward involves an inquiry into the pre-constructional and constructional causes of literary works. Such an inquiry attempts to explain the uses of certain forms, techniques, subject matter by writers, to contextualize literary works in terms of broad, collective causes such as the national character, the spirit of the age, the movements within a society and so on. It would be fruitful to recount the history of the Indian English novel in the light of this approach.

David Perkins's classification into three types of literary history, encyclopaedic literary history, conceptual literary history and narrative literary history, more or less, endorses the principles of literary history as outlined by Crane. It is too early to frame the history of the Indian English novel on the basis of such concepts. Narrative literary history, for instance, which describes change from one state to another, has a plot, with a beginning, a middle and an end. These plots can be graphed in the form of rise, decline and rise and decline. The Indian English novel has only just risen. It would be difficult to plot it in the form of a narrative literary history.

Conceptual literary history interrelates authors and their works on the basis of a shared concept such as 'Romanticism' or 'the Age of Reason' and further integrates one concept under one period. Such an approach, as Perkins himself has pointed out, emphasizes only those texts which fit the concepts, interpretes these texts only in terms of the concepts they reflect and fails to give an account of the multiplicity, diversity and ambiguity of the past. These objections are particularly valid in the context of the Indian English novel. Any history of this area of literature, which highlights only some texts at the cost of others, would appear to be inadequate and incomplete.

Encylopaedic literary history which consists of a series of separate studies of authors and their works without any attempt to show 'continuity' or 'development', enjoys the advantage of presenting several points of view. It is not confined by a single narrative. In the instance of the Indian English novel, such an approach may prove to be a more truthful rendering of its state, however disorganized and piecemeal such a rendering may appear to be.

The basic concepts of New Historicism offer a rich resource for writing the history of the Indian English novel in the future. At the present hour, however, these principles can be utilized only after careful consideration.

New Historicists offer suggestions for writing a literary history in terms of a cultural history, where the focus is not so much on the texts as on the social and political contexts of the text, ideas such as patronage and publishing laws which have a direct influence on the production of texts. Such an emphasis is particularly relevant with regard to the history of the Indian English novel. A study of the social and political contexts of Indian English novels is likely to provide innumerable historical insights. Similarly, an analysis of the demand for this type of fiction as fostered by patronage and publishing houses would be a step in the right direction. It would help to explain the sudden spurt in the production of this fiction, both within and outside the country.

Another principle of New Historicism is its determined rejection of canonization of texts. This rejection is based on the desire for the formation of a broad ideological code, where all texts enjoy an equal status. The chief argument in this dissertation is on the necessity to avoid canon-making while formulating the history of the Indian English novel. Canon-making at this juncture will only serve to limit a broad study of this area.

The final emphasis in New Historicism is on culture as a tremendous force in history. An attempt to examine the cultural force behind the phenomenon of the Indian English novel would have an immense value. Makarand Paranjpe has already raised some

significant questions regarding its cultural identity and value. The future historian of the Indian English novel will be in a better position to debate on these questions and assess the contribution of this field of literature to Indian culture and vice versa.

Jauss's theory of the Aesthetics of Reception, which lays emphasis on the interpretation of the texts by readers over successive generations may open fresh fields for the future historian of the Indian English novel. Jauss's concept of the 'horizon of expectations' of each generation, by which he means the criterion established by every generation for evaluating texts, helps to determine the aesthetic meaning and value of each text. According to Jauss, literary history can be formulated through a 'fusion' of successive 'horizons of expectations' The history of the Indian English novel may be written in this manner in the future. For the present, it is too soon in time to determine 'a horizon of expectations' of the readers of the Indian English novel, much less, form a fusion of such expectations.

Like Jauss, Iser, too stresses the role of the reader in determining the meaning of the text. He has shown how each successive act of reading keeps modifying the expectations and viewpoints of the reader. A literary history written along these lines will revolutionize existing concepts of historiography. In the area of the Indian English novel such a concept is only a distant dream.

Reader response theorists such as Stanley Fish, Michael Riffattere, Norman Holland and David Bleich have presented wholly new perspectives for reviewing literary history. Fish breaks down the distinction between language and literature and ultimately views culture itself in terms of a text. According to Riffattere, literary

history should focus on the coming together of the lingustic code embedded within the text and the code which the reader brings with him while interpreting it. Norman Holland and David Bleich have both highlighted the significance of the 'subjective response' of the reader to the text in establishing its meaning. These concepts may be found extremely beneficial in the future by the historian of the Indian English novel, when this area has had time enough to strengthen its literary roots. For the time being, such radical concepts of historiography are unrequired and untimely.

Hayden White's primary concern is with the element of 'interpretation' in literary history He maintains that literary history is narrative in nature, involving the construction of a plot and the employment of different paradigms through which the historian may provide explanations. Once again, these notions are too sophisticated for application in the context of the Indian English novel.

In conclusion, one may state that both the existing criticism in the area of the Indian English novel and the western critical theories regarding literary history do not provide an adequate groundwork for formulating the history of the Indian English novel. The former has proved to be too immature in this regard, while the latter appears to be too pre-mature for employment. The concluding chapter of this dissertation proposes alternatives to these considerations for attempting such a history.

VIII

However desirable it would be to bring some of the sophistication of Western historiography to our thinking about charting the history of the Indian English novel, a great deal of caution needs to be exercised while applying western critical thought to an area of

literature which is basically Indian in its sensibility. One cannot lift these theories out of their own context and mechanically graft them onto an alien cultural phenomenon. The Indian English novel is rooted in Indian society and culture. Therefore, it is 'culture-specific'. No Western theory, however explanatory and all-embracing it may be in its own content, can fully account for a literary phenomenon localized in its own socio-cultural context.

Postcolonial discourse has, in its own way attempted to come to terms with postcolonial literatures, to account for the growth and development and nature of postcolonial literatures. However this belated recognition of the postcolonial voice is seen as yet another instance of cultural imperialism. Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Arun Mukherjee, Helen Tiffin, Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths have effectively demonstrated the hollow nature of this sudden concern for marginalized literatures, namely the literatures produced in the previously colonized nations, India, Sri Lanka and the like. Said in particular, has in his powerfully argued *Culture and Imperialism*, exploded the myth of Western re-awakening as far as the culture of the previously colonized world is concerned. Said has shown how this so called 're-awakening' is nothing but another instance of western cultural hegemony and practice of assimilation. It reeks of imperialistic condescension and conviction of the ultimate superiority of western (white) culture over other (black) cultures.

Said demonstrates how cultural forms particularly the novel form, consciously or unconsciously re-inforce and acknowledge imperialist ideology. By imperialism, Said means, "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory. 'Colonialism' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant terri-

tory.... In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic and social practices."[29]

Said has shown how western culture is inextricably and inherently a part of western imperialism

> Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. We may thus consider imperialism as a process occuring as part of the metropolitan culture, which at times acknowledges, at other times obscures the sustained business of the empire itself... As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to re-read it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which the dominating discourse acts.[30]

Finally, Said reveals how native literature stands up and offers active resistance to the assimilationist and homogenizing tendency of western theorists.

Like Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak have also shown how postcolonial literatures try to repossess lost territory and history, by giving space to the marginalized sections of the human society, the sub-altern, the colonized.

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural re-presentation involved in the contest for

political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third world countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that atempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity. To bend Jurgen Habermas to our purposes, we could also argue that the postcolonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those social pathologies - 'loss of meaning, conditions of anomie' - that no longer simply cluster around class antagonism, (but) break up into widely scattered historical contingencies.[31]

Bhabha further, goes onto state, "A range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history - subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement - that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality - as it emerges in non-canonical cultural forms - transforms our critical strategies. It forces us to confront the concept of culture outside objects d'art or beyond the canonization of the 'idea' of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of in commensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival.[32]

In her celebrated paper, *Can the sub-altern speak?* Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak problematizes the question of how the third world subject is re-presentated within the western discourse. In this connection, she speaks for the sub-altern woman, discussing at length the paradoxical nature of the British abolition of widow-sacrifice. She also draws attention to the work done by the Sub-altern Studies group led by Ranjit Guha, whose project is "to re-think Indian colonial historiography from the perspective of the discontinuous chain of peasant insurgencies during the colonial period."[33]

Arun Mukherjee's article *Whose Post-Colonialism and whose post-modernism*? is "aimed at critiquing the totalizations of both post-colonialists and the post-modernists that end up assimilating and homogenizing non-western texts within a Eurocentric cultural economy".[34]

She objects to the use of the term post-modernist in connection with post-colonial literature on the grounds that both post-modernists and post-colonialists are guilty of erasing all differences related to gender, race, class, caste, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

> It seems to me, then that the theoretical constructs of both post-modernists and post-colonialists have made assimilationist and homogenizing moves. Post-modernism, despite its theoretical pronouncements against totalizing and universalizing, ends up doing just that when it refers to the texts of non-Europeans in the company of texts of Euro-Americans as though no social, cultural, historical, political, epistemological, historical, political, epistemological and ontological differences separated them....What is further emphasized in these comparisons are the formal properties of the works. Thus antirealist representation, parody, auto-referentiallity, problematizing of

history etc. are deemed to be post-modern tendencies, regardless of their purpose or origin in non-European traditions of story telling. The formal strategies of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for example, seemed very familiar to his Indian readers, who have grown up reading fictional forms like the *Tilism*, *Aiyyari*, *Betal Pachisi*, and *Panchatantra*. The indigenous roots of the work of 'postmodernist' writers like Rushdie are seldom acknowledged and examined by postmodernists.[35]

She finds the tendency of post-colonialists to define the post-colonial experience within the narrow, binary frame work of centre and margin, and to use the term 'post-colonial' to describe "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the the present day" (Ashcroft et al 2) equally objectionable.

When post-colonial theory constructs its centre - periphery discourse, it also obliterates the fact that the post-colonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominants and marginals. It erases the Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia' of literary and social discourse in post-colonial societies that arises from conflicts of race, class, gender, language, religion, ethnicity and political affiliation. When it focusses only on those texts that 'subvert' or 'resist' the colonizer, it overlooks a large number of texts that speak about these other matters.[36]

In her other article entitled *The Exclusions of post-colonial theory and Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable" : A case study*, she has tried to suggest through her reading of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* how postcolonial theory performs "several homogenizing

functions which produce an essentialized 'native' who is devoid of race, gender, class, caste, ethnic and religious markers."[37] She further suggests that "Post-colonial theory's exclusive concern with this essentialized native's 'resistence' to the colonizer, another essentialized construction, is politically retrogressive insofar as it occludes, on the one hand, this resisting native's own ideological agendas and, on the other, the heterogeneity of voices in post-colonial societies."[38]

IX

The limitations of post-colonial discourse when it comes to reflecting the plurality of voices both among and within post-colonial societies, become all too evident through the observations of the critics outlined above. The need to take into account specific factors such as race, class, caste, gender, ethnicity while formulating critical theories or histories of Indian English literature is also made imperative.

The Indian novelist in English is caught between two cultures. And therefore modern literary theories such as, say, the marxist theory cannot satisfactorily define the evolution of such literature. According to marxist theory, literature is rooted in social realism. Its ideological content is determined by the material interests of the dominant social class. Canons of great literature are socially generated. Lukacs argued that the novel reflects reality, not merely the surface appearance of reality but gives "a truer, more complete, more vivid and more dynamic reflection of reality." The novel provides the reader with a fuller, more concrete insight into reality. Such a theory may be valid for the European novel which emerged out of a relatively uniform European ideological ethos. The Indian novel in English cannot be related to any one ideology or

class. The city of Bombay, for instance, may figure as the background for an elite, upper-middle class writer as well as a Dalit writer. If literature is, indeed, a reworking of ideological discourse, the complexities within the Indian novel in English would present a considerable challenge to a simplistic theory relating literature and ideology.

Another reason why purely western theories would fail to account for the growth and development of the Indian English novel is that these western theories have sprung from a monolithic cultural sensibility. Whereas the Indian English novel is a distinct literary phenomenon, having sprung from both the native soil and the diasporic experience. The diasporic nature of a large part of Indian English fiction is evident in the case of most of those writers who have migrated abroad and chosen to write about their displacement. The new history of the Indian English novel will have to probe into this unique literary phenomenon of Indian novelists, settled abroad, turning back to their native roots to nurture their creative sensibility. Such writers are uniquely placed in the sense that on the one hand they are exposed to the subtleties of western literary thought which, no doubt, helps to shape their own literary skills and instincts and on the other hand, they draw upon their own literary traditions and cultural resources to create a new body of literature. They are required to perform a fine, balancing act while treading between two disparate literary traditions, two different cultures.

In other words, conventional notions about charting the history of Indian English fiction, mainly fostered by Western historiography and Western critical theories will have to be discarded in favour of more dynamic, more realistic ideas. For instance, one of the

first notions to be shelved would have to be that of periodization. Conventional histories of literature have been charted in terms of periods and movements such as classicism, romanticism, neo-classicism. Sometimes, the periods are classified on the basis of the reigns of monarchs such as the Elizabethan age, the Victorian age, the Edwardian age. Sometimes the classification of periods is related to extra-literary events such as the Reformation, the Puritan Revolution, the Restoration. Thus, there exists a confusing medley of terms and criteria for defining periods.

In the first place, it is too early to think of a history of the Indian English novel in terms of periods or ages. An existence of a hundred odd years is too short a period to allow grandiose divisions in the form of periods and movements. In my opinion, the Indian English novel has only just begun to emerge out of its formative stages. It will be desirable to study this body of literature in terms of schools or clusters of writers rather than periods or ages. Making loose distinctions such as pre-independence writers and post-independence writers does not serve any useful purpose for the historian. Political labels are hardly a reliable indicator of literary substance or value. They do not aid beyond dating the writers. Nor does it help to speak of the evolution in style and technique, say, from R. K. Narayan to Rushdie. Each writer has his own unique style and technique and neither is affected by the style and technique of the other. Narayan's style has remained, more or less, unchanged over the five decades of his career as a novelist. To place Narayan in one cut-and-dried period and Rushdie in another is ridiculous, for Narayan's span of writing extends into and goes beyond Rushdie's arrival.

Once these notions about periodization, are shelved, the task ahead of the new historian of the Indian English novel becomes much clearer. The history of this area of literature must emerge out of its own historical progression.

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