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**An Assessment of Terminologies Applied in the Postmodern Literature
(With Special Reference to Major Postmodern Thinkers)**

Muskan Solanki

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English
School of Language, Literature and Arts
Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies
Academic Campus, Barla, Raisen, MP, India

Abstract

The term postmodern literature refers to the works written post Second World War exhibiting characteristics like the use of irony, humor, pastiche, metafiction, intertextuality, fragmentation and so on. Postmodernism was a reaction against the ideas of Enlightenment and Modernism. As a whole, it is still hard to define postmodernism in a single frame as till date it is debatable whether postmodernism has completely flourished yet, or it is dead or even reached its apex or not. Postmodernism is quite a broad movement of the late twentieth century. The writing techniques of postmodernist literature are also essential to understand and interpret the works written by the authors. The paper tries to cover the terminologies used while studying postmodernism and the key thinkers and philosophers, who, served as the pioneers in initiating postmodern philosophy. In this respect, the present research paper makes an attempt to critically assess the literary terminologies applied in regard to Postmodern Literature

with special mention of the key thinkers of postmodern age.

Keywords: Postmodernism, intertextuality, pastiche, postmodern literature, fragmentation.

Introduction

To understand postmodernism, it is essential to have an idea about the preceding ages of postmodernism i.e., modernism and the age of enlightenment. A text cannot exist in isolation. Similarly, this is the case with postmodernism. Postmodernism carries with it the concepts of past and present to create a new future. Postmodernism is often quoted word in contemporary times. It is difficult to delimit postmodernism in a single definition and hence it is important to study the terminologies used in the postmodern era.

Postmodernism is the term applied to the works of literature and arts composed after the period of the Second World War i.e.,

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post-1950s. It's not only a continuation of modernist ways of ideas, but also a form of rejection. It endeavors to break the set pattern of modern thinking and beliefs. It also refers to the changes and developments that occurred within the field of literature, culture, literary theory, art, architecture, and philosophy till the 1990s. The Postmodern Period is considered to be the era from the end of the Second World War to the contemporary times. The term **Post modernity** refers to the historical period after modernity.

The prefix 'post' in postmodernism means after or later. It is more than the 'next phase' of an already existing trend. The use of 'post' enabled the philosophers and thinkers to deny and negate all that had happened earlier and to reach a point of post-progress, post-history, post-reason, and a realm in which consistency, connectedness, general truths had lost their validity. Postmodernism rejects the temporal and spatial; the notion of the past, present, and future, the distinctiveness of behavior patterns in different cultures therefore, in its actual form, postmodernism is a negation of all life and history up to modernity or modernism. It states that ugliness in life is not unattractive as it has its own charm of realism.

The term 'postmodernism' was first used by Arnold Toynbee in 1947 to describe a contemporary western world in

crisis, when people struggled to make sense of a century characterized by conflict and mass genocide, leading to questioning traditional moral values and beliefs. The Postmodern period is highly influenced by critical theories such as post-structuralism, Existentialism, Nihilism, Psychoanalysis, Apocalyptic theory, Surrealism, Deconstruction, and so on.

The major task of defining postmodernism as a new evolving thought stems from its broad usage in a domain of cultural and critical movements since the 1970s. According to Cambridge English Dictionary, 'Postmodernism denotes a style of art, writing, music, theatre, and especially architecture that was popular in the West in the 1980s and 90s.' Postmodernism describes not only a period but also a set of ideas as well, and can only be understood with another equally complex term: Modernism. Modernism was a diverse cultural movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whose common thread was a break with tradition, epitomized by poet Ezra Pound's 1934 injunction to "make it new!" Postmodernism clearly questions the ideas and values associated with a form of modernism that believes in progress and innovation.

Thus, based on the above discussions, the main features of postmodernism can be best understood by

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stating that - Postmodernism rejects all the fundamental modern principles like universalism, rationalism, and essentialism. It also rejects the concept of meta-narratives or grand-narratives. It also denies the modernist faith in truth, as the ultimate foundation. It believes in hyper-reality and simulacrum. It develops various new methodologies viz., localism, deconstruction, fragmentation, and the like. It accepts the differences of truth, reality, rationality, culture, and language so that every section of society can find its due representation. Postmodernism believes that there is no correct form of reality, as there is a possibility of having multiple realities and truths. It is undoubtedly a skeptical view.

Hence, postmodernism is a contemporary philosophy, which keeps its faith in deconstruction, fragmentation and has its impact on every branch of knowledge differently and uniquely. To this, literature cannot be an exception. It has a great influence on the forms and techniques of modern and postmodern English novels.

Review of Literature

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the work, the present research has taken into consideration various research papers written on the style and techniques of postmodern literature. They are as follows:

Chaudhary, Preety and Ramen Sharma (2011) in the research paper entitled *Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare* discusses the main features and characteristics of postmodern literature.

Whisnant, Clayton (2013) in the work entitled *Some Common Themes and Ideas within the Field of Postmodern Thought: A Handout of His 389* talks about postmodernism at length. The work covers the major critical thinkers of postmodernism and focuses the ideas behind the arrival of postmodernism.

Rezaei, Ammar (2014) in the research paper entitled *Post-Modernism Features in English Literature* discusses the recent developments in literature, literary theory and culture from the point of view of postmodernism and analyses whether what appears as newness is rather a return to traditional concepts and practices.

Nath, Shanjendu (2014) in the research paper entitled *The Concept of Reality from Postmodern Perspectives* deals with the concept of postmodernism as an academic movement in philosophy and highlights the basic tenants of postmodernism contrasting it with modernism.

Fedosova, Tatyana (2015) in the research paper entitled *Reflection of Time in Postmodern Literature* covers the key

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tendencies in postmodern literature emphasizing on the notion of time in the postmodern works. The paper also focuses on the writing techniques such as pastiche, playfulness, metafiction, fragmentation and non-linear narrative style.

N. Elaati, Abdulazim(2016) in the research work entitled *Postmodernism Theory* explains the framework of Postmodernism in four different perspectives as philosophical, historical, political and strategic. The paper also deals with the foundations of postmodernism and the pioneers of the postmodern theory.

Sheeba(2017) in the research paper entitled *Postmodern Literature: Practices and Theory* discusses the origin of postmodernism, major scholars and key themes and techniques of postmodern literature. The paper also covers the problems and issues of postmodernism.

Yousef, Tawfiq(2017) in the research paper entitled *Modernism, Postmodernism, and Metamodernism: A Critique* examines the contemporary literary theory. The paper investigates the main features of modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism with special reference to representative works.

Penki, Raju and A. PavaniSasidhar (2020)in the research paper entitled *Modernism and Post Modernism - A Descriptive Study* analyses the relationship

between modernism and postmodernism as well the key elements of both the ages.

Key Themes and Techniques Applied in Postmodern Literature

Unlike other periods and movements in Literature, Postmodernism do not hold a rigid set of ideas. It is quite flexible in its approach and interpretation of subjects. It is notable that it rejects the notion of universal truth and objectivity stating them as mere ‘constructs.’ It often negates the rationality of Enlightenment and ideas of Modernism. Most of these techniques are interrelated to each other. Here are some major themes and techniques helpful for interpreting a postmodernist text:

Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. It denotes the inter-relationship and the interdependence of literary texts with the works of past. According to Kristeva, literary text is not an isolated phenomenon and any text is the ‘absorption and transformation of another.’ Any text acknowledges or refers to the works from the history. It may be a deliberate effort on the part of author or can be coincidental as well. Her idea if intertextuality is different from other theorists such as Barthes.

Pastiche simply means to combine or paste various elements together. It is somehow related to intertextuality. It involves mixing multiple genres and elements of literature in

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order to create something new and unique. “It is a patchwork of words, sentences or complete passages from various authors or one author.” It can be a kind of imitation and when done intentionally by author, it can also be regarded as a form of parody. In short, pastiche reflects the character trait of post modernity of being chaotic and pluralistic but at the same time unique as well.

Metafiction is a piece of fictional work which reflects on the fictionality of the work. The reader is constantly made aware of the fact that he/she is reading a fictional work. It clarifies the readers that a fictional work cannot deliver the pleasure of or access to a real world. However, metafiction is not a new device but gained popularity in the postmodern literature.

Historiographic Metafiction was coined by Linda Hutcheon. It encompasses the fictional works which fictionalizes the actual historical events, figures or instances from the past.

Use of Irony, Playfulness and Black Humor are the central features in many postmodern works. The use of irony is not a new concept as it was first recorded in Plato’s *Republic* as well. Gradually, the use of irony became more frequent and by the end of eighteenth century, irony was seen more as a philosophic vision of looking the entire world rather merely as a rhetoric

device. Later, the philosophers such as Heine, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also developed the theory of irony. The most recent form of postmodern irony is used “to describe the self-awareness exhibited by metafiction that the world described by the narrative is a fabrication of the author, its characters are constructs and is merely a reworking of other texts.” The postmodernist authors often treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous manner.

Fabulation was first used by Caxton in *Fabulator* in 1484. Later, it was re-introduced by Robert Scholes in his book *The Fabulators* (1967). It involves allegory and use of strange and dreamlike effects to enhance the appeal of the text. It rejects the concept of realism. It is used to describe the anti-novel.

Poioumenais is a kind of metafiction in which the subject is about the process of creation. It was coined by Alastair Fowler. Many metafictional novels such as *The Comforters* by Muriel Spark that deals with this technique involves hints or metaphors on the process of creating the book in the story.

Temporal Disorder is the most used technique in postmodernist literature in order to add irony in the text. It simply means to disorder the linear coherence of the narrative. The unity of time plays a

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significant role here in order to disrupt the past, present and future.

Magic Realism incorporates the use of still, sharply defined, smoothly painted images of figures and objects depicted in a surrealistic manner. The themes and subjects are often imaginary and assert a dream-like quality. The term was coined by Franz Roh in 1925.

Technoculture and Hyperreality The term Hyperreality was first used by Umberto Eco and later was discussed by Jean Baudrillard as well. Baudrillard says that postmodernity was a shift into hyperreality. In the postmodern world, the information and technology have occupied a prime place in the lives of people and hence the understanding of the real is vastly affected by the notion of hyperreal or the simulations.

Paranoia and paranoid anxieties are reflected in many postmodernist writings. It is seen in the distrust of faith, ambiguity, non-linear narratives.

Maximalism is the use of grand language and details in the story. It involves each and every minute detail which minimalist writers often leaves. It is somehow disorganized and lacks emotional content.

Minimalism is the opposite of maximalism as it only presents the most necessary elements and promotes the economy of

words. Minimalist writers' choice of diction is very poignant and judicious. The writers only depict the general context and allow reader's imagination to carry forward the story of the work. They avoid meaningless details. The characters are also unexceptional and unlike maximalist characters are taken from mundane life.

Use of Analepsis and Prolepsis simply means the use of 'flashback' and 'flash-forward' technique to make narrative non-linear and interesting. It is used to disorder the narrative discourse.

Major Postmodern Thinkers

Postmodernism is more of a French thing as most of the critical theories were propounded by the French philosophers and sociologist such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger and grouped together with other major theorists, they developed many topics in postmodern philosophy.

Michel Foucault was a French Philosopher, literary critic and political activist. He is often associated with structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism. His major works are *The History of Madness in the Classical Age*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, *The Abnormal*, *The Madness and Civilization* and *The Order of Things*.

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Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher who was highly influenced by German philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. He was among the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodernism. He initiated the school of deconstruction which is a key subject in literature and linguistics. His major works include *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*.

Jean Francois Lyotard was a French thinker. He is best known for his notions about postmodernism and the impact of postmodernity on human condition. He has authored *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* and emerged as one of the most important philosophers of postmodernism. He defines postmodernism as “*incredulity towards metanarratives.*”

Jean Baudrillard was a French philosopher and theorist often associated with post-structuralism and postmodernism. He is often known for the concepts of hyperreality and Simulation. His major works are *Simulacra and Simulation* and *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*.

Frederic Jameson is an American Marxist thinker and literary critic. He is a notable figure in postmodernism due to his analysis of contemporary cultural trends as well as analysis of postmodernism and capitalism. His renowned works include *The Political*

Unconsciousness and Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

Conclusion

The research paper concludes that although postmodernism is a complex subject to comprehend at the same time it offers the readers to have their own interpretation of the text. The ambiguous nature of postmodern concepts raised chaos and negativity but provided an opportunity to create own interpretation and meaning. There is a number of critical thinkers, who, negate and condemn postmodern thought stating that it is already dead. To many readers, it is still hard to completely understand postmodernism. It is interesting to note unlike modernism; the postmodern age enjoys the fragmentary nature of the universe. Thus, the essence of postmodern thought itself lies in understanding it in fragments to create and establish own interpretations. Postmodern thought does not aim at confining the thought process whereas it aims at igniting the critical thinking of the readers.

Postmodernism is a mixture of various theories and set of ideas which makes it more bizarre and confusing. Postmodernist, no doubt, raises the issue of problem, but do not provide any solution to it. Therefore, many critics believe that postmodernism only talks about the theoretical aspects rather than the facts and practicality. It offers a very pessimistic and

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skeptical notion about life and nature. Postmodernism disregards the notion of absolute truth. It states that there is no universal truth and everything is merely constructs that are created in accordance with the need of time and state. They are open to change. Thus, postmodernism offers a sense of liberty in the sense of thinking but thus liberty is treated more like chaos rather than making judicious use of it.

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