

SUBJECT NAME: LITERARY CRITICISM

SUBJECT CODE: CEN 53

UNIT -V

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminist literary criticism knows as the critical analysis of literary works based on the feminist perspective. In other words, feminist literary criticism is a kind of literary criticism on the basis of feminist theory or the politics of feminism more precisely. In particular, it also can be explained as using ideological discourses and feminist rules to study language, structure and being of literature. "This school of thought seeks to describe and analyze the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male domination in regard to female bodies by exploring the economic, social, political, and psychological forces embedded within literature."

Feminist literary criticism has almost gone through two centuries up to now. This literary criticism based on the reflection of women's situation by themselves in a long term and achievement of their specific and practical action. Thus, feminism is the source of feminist literary criticism. Feminism has experienced two waves. The First Wave, also called liberal feminism, usually refers to the social movement that women fought for their legal vote right and the basic civil rights in American and Britain from 1890 to 1920. In the First Wave, women had successfully strived for their civil rights and the opportunity of attending higher education and finding jobs in the specific industry areas. The more important was that this wave was a prerequisite for the deeper and subtle social works by feminists later. The Second Wave also knows as the Women's Liberation Movement, which focused on the differences between female and male and discussed the origin and operation of gender discrimination in ideology, culture and society. Owing to this ideology of the feminists, the early development of the feminist literary criticism tried to seek a chance and approach to change mechanism of literature between personal and political.

2. The Development of Feminist Literary Criticism

The modern feminist movement originates from *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Over these years, the concept of being equal with male has developed into different stages and various feminist schools have come into being: radical feminism, liberal feminism, socialist feminism, black feminism, post-modern feminism and psycho-analytical feminism.

According to the schools of ideologies and thoughts, feminism can be mainly divided into four groups: Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, socialist feminism and Marxist feminism. Because of differences of historical and cultural inheritance, western feminist literary criticism mainly consists of American school, Britain school and French school. These schools were not totally isolated, instead they were communicated, affected and promoted each other. No matter what kind of schools, they all made great contribution to the development and maturity of feminist literary criticism. According to Lisa Tuttle, the final goal of feminist criticism is "to develop and uncover a female tradition of writing," "to analyze women writers and their writings from a female perspective", "to rediscover old texts", "to interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view" "to resist sexism in literature and to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style".

The Key Terms of Feminist Literary Criticism There are many classic and far-reaching feminist works created by those rather wise, serious and important feminists. Such as *The Second Sex* (Simone de Beauvoir), *Sexual Politics* (Kate Millet), *Thinking About Women* (Mary Ellman), *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (Elaine Showalter) and other feminist classics created by other feminist pioneers all made great contribution to the development and maturity of feminist

literary criticism. Concerning the critical theory of feminism, there are some significant key terms: the patriarchy, the other and the second sex will be discussed in details below.

First wave feminism: men's treatment of women (late 1700s-early 1900s)

The first wave of feminists largely focused on inequalities between the sexes. This is also the wave of feminism that contains the women's suffrage movement, led by Susan B. Anthony and Victoria Woodhull.

Thus, the first wave of feminist criticism largely focused on how male authors and novelists view and portray women in their works. Critics in this time considered the ways in which novelists discriminate against and marginalize women characters.

Some key books from this time are Geoffrey Chaucer's "Wife of Bath," Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792), Mary Ellman's "Thinking About Women" (1968) and Kate Millet's "Sexual Politics" (1969). Ellman, Millet and Germaine Greer played an important role in raising questions about the practice of showing feminism in both contemporary and canon literature.

Second wave feminism: gynocriticism (early 1960s-late 1970s)

The second wave of feminism focused on establishing more equal working conditions, which were necessary in the U.S. during World War II, and bringing women together for feminist political activism.

The feminist criticism during this wave is also called "gynocriticism," and it involves three major aspects:

Examination and recognition of female writers' work.

Consideration of the treatment of women in literary works by both male and female authors.

Exploring the canon of literature written by female writers in order to understand female writers' contributions in the context of female empowerment and criticizing the ways women have been treated (and mistreated) in various cultures.

During this time, Simone de Beauvoir ("Le Deuxième Sexe", 1949) and Elaine Showalter established the groundwork for feminist theories and helped them spread more broadly.

In her book "A Literature of Their Own," Showalter proposed three phases of women writing:

Feminine Phase: women writers try to follow the rules made by male writers, try to avoid debating and questioning women's place in the literature, and try to write as men by using male pseudonyms.

Feminist Phase: women writers begin criticizing women's treatment in society and literature, and the oppression of women in society is the main theme of gender criticism in their works.

Female Phase: women writers begin moving from merely providing the woman's perspective to having confidence in their work and assuming that whatever they have written is valid and doesn't need aggressive arguments and support to prove its authenticity.

Third wave feminism (early 1990s-present)

This wave of feminism seeks to resist the perceived essentialist (overgeneralized, oversimplified) ideologies and white, heterosexual, middle-class focus of second wave feminism. It borrows from post-structural and contemporary race and gender theories to expand on marginalized populations' experiences. Third wave feminists emphasize individual rights, as well as acceptance of diversity.

The third wave's roots are in the "riot grrl" feminist punk subculture that began in Olympia, Washington in the early 1990s. That subculture began with the purpose of bringing consciousness and politics together through punk style.

In this time, writers such as Alice Walker work to reconcile feminism with their own minority communities' concerns. Some key works to understand this wave's feminist criticisms are Deborah McDowell's "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" (1980), Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" (1983), Lillian S. Robinson's "Treason out Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon" (1983), and Camille Paglia's "Sexual Personae: The Androgyne in Literature and Art" (1990). Riot grrls and Sarah Dyer's Action Girl Newsletter also played important roles in creating the iconography and style for the zine movement for women in this era.

Changed views towards feminism in the third wave

Third wave feminists, authors and critics argue that feminism's meaning has changed considerably, and needs to now be viewed with a different perspective. They believe that women need to rise above concerns about equality merely in jobs, education or family settings. Instead, third wave feminists argue, women need to raise their voices and fight for their rights.

Chief Justice Clarence Thomas' appointment to the Supreme Court despite sexual harassment allegations against him by Anita Hill was a major tipping point for this movement. For women in the third wave, Thomas' appointment illustrated the need for more work for feminism.

POST-COLONIALISM

A critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and modes of discourse on the Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands and South America, postcolonialism concerns itself with the study of the colonization (which began as early as the Renaissance), the decolonization (which involves winning back and reconstituting the native cultures), and the neocolonising process (an aftermath of

postmodernism and late capitalism, when multinational corporations control the world). Focussing on the omnipresent power struggles between cultures and the intersection of cultures which results in multiculturalism and poly-valency of culture, Postcolonialism analyses the metaphysical, ethical and political concerns about cultural identity, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, subjectivity, language and power.

Influenced by the poststructuralist and postmodern idea of decentering, postcolonial literary criticism undermines the universalist claims of literature, identifies colonial sympathies in the canon, and replaces the colonial metanarratives with counter-narratives of resistance, by rewriting history and asserting cultural identities through strategies such as separatism, nativism, cultural syncretism, hybridity, mimicry, active participation and assimilation. Backed by an anti-essentialist notion of identity and culture, it critiques cultural hierarchies and the Eurocentrism of modernity. The major theoretical works in postcolonial theory include The Wretched of the Earth (1961) by Franz Fanon, Orientalism (1978) by Edward Said, In Other Worlds (1987) by Gayatri Spivak, The Empire Writes Back (1989) by Bill Ashcroft et al, Nation and Narration (1990) by Homi K Bhabha, and Culture and Imperialism (1993) by Edward Said. In literature, indigenous people from previously colonised and marginalised countries have increasingly found their voices, attempting to assert their own visions, tell their own stories and reclaim their experiences and histories.

With the objective of locating the modes of representation where Europeans constructed natives in politically prejudiced ways, post colonial criticism intends to unveil such literary figures, themes and representatives that have enforced imperial ideology, colonial domination and continuing Western hegemony. It endeavours to probe beneath the obvious and apparently universal/aesthetic/humanist themes in order to reveal their racial, gendered, imperial assumptions. Postcolonial critics reinterpret and examine the values of literary texts, by focussing on the contexts in which they were produced, and reveal the colonial ideologies that are concealed within. Such approaches are exemplified in Chinua Achebe's rereading of Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Edward Said's rereading of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, Sara Suleri's rereading of Kipling's Kim, Homi K Bhabha's rereading of Forster's A Passage to India. They seek to identify the gaps and fissures within the discourse that provide the native with means of resistance and subversion, and the dissenting colonial with means of articulating opposition.

Key concepts in Postcolonialism

Othering: Othering involves two concepts — the “Exotic Other” and the “Demonic Other,” The Exotic Other represents a fascination with the inherent dignity and beauty of the primitive/undeveloped other, as delineated in Yeats' Byzantium poems; while the Demonic Other is represented as inferior, negative, savage and evil as is described in novels like Heart of Darkness and A Passage to India.

Diaspora: Diaspora refers to people who have been displaced or dispersed from their homelands, and who possess and share a collective memory and myth, and the nostalgic reminiscence of “home” (“imaginary homelands,” to use Rushdie's term) or an inherited ideology of “home” becomes a personal identity as well as a collective identity of members of a particular community. They are not rooted in one location, and live in the memories of their “Imagined homelands.” In the new geographical location, they negotiate their culture and that of the host nation. Indian diasporic experience, for instance, has been extensively documented by authors

like Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Menon Marath, Dom Moraes, Farrukh Dhondy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, and many others. Diasporic theorists such as Avtar Brah and Robin Cohen propose the idea of a home as a mythic one, a place of desire in the diasporic imagination, a place to which there can be no return, despite the possibilities of visiting the place that is seen as the place of origin.

Hybridity/ Syncretism: The Schizophrenic state of the migrant as s/he attempts to combine the culture of origin with that of the host country, without abandoning either is called ‘Hybridity’ or ‘Syncretism’. The central theme in postcolonial diasporic literature is the negotiation of two identities — the split consciousness of being both, yet neither completely; the multiple identities or solidarities; or in extreme cases, reassertion of native cultural identity as manifest in cultural fundamentalism. Hybridity in postcolonial studies has been influenced by the work of political theorists like Will Kymlicka who posits a “multicultural citizenship” in the globalised world. This leads to the emergence of new identities where the original identity, historical experiences and memories are not abandoned but is constructively merged with the host culture, to move beyond the “constructed” limits of both, forging solidarities against essential racial oppression. Cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall have argued for “new ethnicities” that deny ideas of essential black or essential white identity, proposing a “real heterogeneity of interests and identities.”

Double Consciousness: A major concept formulated by W.E.B. Du Bois, double consciousness echoes Frantz Fanon’s contention of the divided self in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the black always sees himself through the eyes of the white. Du Bois described double consciousness as “two souls, two thoughts...in one dark body”, which Meena Alexander later altered as “many souls, many thoughts... in one dark body”— pointing to the migrant’s experience in multiple subject positions — a recurrent theme in the writings of Ben Okri, Amitav Ghosh, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips and others.

Subaltern: Subaltern is a term introduced by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the working class, and used and popularized by Gayatri Spivak in the postcolonial context, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. In this essay, Spivak raises issues about the voice of the subaltern in rebellion against the colonizer, and the authenticity of the voice of the subaltern — whether s/he speaks or is spoken for? Thus Spivak ridicules the hypocrisy of postcolonial discourses that claim to raise the voices of hitherto unheard, while they inadvertently serve to perpetuate the marginality and the subalternity of the oppressed. Spivak’s essay was a critique of the work of the Subaltern Studies group including Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Shahid Amin and others.

Mimicry: Mimicry demonstrates an ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized subject mimics the colonizer by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, language, attire, values etc. In doing so, he mocks and parodies the colonizer. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized. Homi Bhabha notes that mimicry is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced “as almost the same, but not quite” — it contains both mockery and a menace; it reveals the limitations in the authority of the colonial discourse, almost as though the colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction.

History: Writing in the wake of decolonization, after long years of imperial suppression and effacement of identity, the writers of the Third World nations are increasingly interested and keen on writing about their native histories, problems of colonization; they have written case studies of cultural colonization, native identity and anti-colonial resistance. Anti-colonial writing

of the first phase is thus of the culturalist nationalist variety — embodied in movements like Negritude, Africanite, and African Aesthetic. These struggles were aimed at liberating themselves at the individual as well as the colonial level, from colonial attitudes and forms of thinking. The postcolonial obsession with history, closely linked with the overarching goal of decolonization, addresses issues such as 1) interrogating the effects of colonialism, especially in terms of cultural alienation; 2) the anti-colonial struggles of the Third World and the rise of nationalism; 3) the creation of mimic men in the colonial culture; 4) the appropriation of history by the colonial master; 5) attempts to retrieve and re-write their own histories by the formerly colonized cultures; and 6) modes of representations. Retrieving history for a postcolonial culture invariably includes an intense awareness that native history without colonial contamination is not possible. The Subaltern Studies project seeks to discover, beneath the layers of colonial historiography, the local resistance to colonialism. It is a history from below, utilizing resources in native languages and non-colonial forms of history-recording such as folksongs, ballads etc.

Nation: The postcolonial writers are conscious of their role in nation-building. In postcolonial literature, the nation-building project seeks to erase the colonial past by rejecting and resisting the Western constructions of the “other” as primitive, savage, demonic etc. and by seeking to retrieve a pre-colonial past that would help them redefine a nation and project a destiny and future. However, the postcolonial methodologies and epistemologies are almost always mediated and manipulated by Western ones, and the native realizes that the destiny of the postcolony is not as ideal as had been dreamt of earlier. Postcolonialism brings with it a new process of exclusion, marginalization and “subalternisation”, as Gyanendra Pandey argues, “minorities are constituted along with the nation”, and a continuation of colonialism through the formation of elites. Literature of postcoloniality that constitutes nationhood emphasizes the modes of constructing, imagining and representing the nation, the role of locality, space, community, religion, spirituality, cultural identity and the politics of nativism in the making of a national identity.

Race: According to Michael Banton, race is a concept that has been the basis of discrimination and disempowerment. Race has become a central category in social, political and cultural theory. Critical race studies, which includes studies of race in literature and culture, ethnicity studies, studies of minority literatures, and specific traditions in literature and philosophy, explicitly addresses questions of race and racial discrimination. Issues of race and ethnicity lead to collective, communal identities and have a larger political and social significance. The political reading/ critical practice of racial studies has had significant impact within Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Black British Studies, Asian American Studies etc. The race turn has also been instrumental in the development of cultural movements like Black Arts and Harlem Renaissance. W.E.B, Du Bois in his writings like *The Souls of Black Folk* criticizes the scientific racism — Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Nazism — which gives rise to “biological discrimination”. He also argued that racism was socially constructed, that it emerged through social discourses and practices and was not scientifically demonstrable

Gender: Postcolonial gender discourse discusses the double colonization of women by both imperialism and patriarchy. In postcolonial literature, gender and sexuality have become prominent themes in the last decades of the 20th century. Gender and the role of women in the postcolonial countries have been the focus in the writings of Anita Desai, Ama Ata Aidoo, Suniti Namjoshi, Buchi Emecheta, and Nawal El Saadawi. The linkage between gender and the racial/ethnic identities has been the subject of numerous autobiographical writings by native Canadian and African-American women like Gloria Anzaldua and Maria Campbell. Postcolonial

gender studies examine how class, caste, economy, political empowerment and literacy have contributed to the condition of women in the Third World countries, Another interesting area of study is the impact of “First World Feminism” on Third World writers while exploring the possibilities of Third World Feminism.

Black Feminism: The domination of the black male in the civil rights movement and the white woman in the feminist propaganda necessitated the emergence of Black Feminism detailing the inextricable connection between sexism and racism. Alice Walker’s *Womanism*, Angela Davis’ *Women, Race and Class* and Kimberle Crenshaw’s *Identity Politics* discusses the marginalized, intersectional plight of the Black women. The Black feminist lesbian organisation, Combahee River Collective, started by activists like Barbara Smith, is ideologically separated from “white feminism.” The CRC questions conventional social hierarchy with the white man at the centre and began creating theory which spoke of the combination of problems, sexism, racism etc. that they had been battling.

Neocolonialism: Neocolonialism refers to the continuing economic dominance and exploitation of the “politically-free” Third World countries by the European imperial powers. Neocolonialism is most often achieved not merely through state control by Euro-American powers, but by a nexus between politicians, bankers, generals, and the Chief Executive officers. International aid and developmental initiatives are very often aligned with economic policy diktats that disable Third World economies. Neocolonialism, therefore, is a more dangerous form of colonialism.

ECO CRITICISM

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. Ecocriticism was officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works, both published in the mid-1990s: *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and *The Environmental Imagination*, by Lawrence Buell.

Ecocriticism investigates the relation between humans and the natural world in literature. It deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and attitudes towards nature are presented and analyzed. One of the main goals in ecocriticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. This form of criticism has gained a lot of attention during recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts, which brings new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies. Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach that is known by a number of other designations, including “green (cultural) studies”, “ecopoetics”, and “environmental literary criticism.”

Western thought has often held a more or less utilitarian attitude to nature —nature is for serving human needs. However, after the eighteenth century, there emerged many voices that demanded a reevaluation of the relationship between man and environment, and man’s view of nature. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, developed the notion of “Deep Ecology” which emphasizes the basic interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features, and presents a symbiotic and holistic world-view rather than an anthropocentric one.

Earlier theories in literary and cultural studies focussed on issue of class, race, gender, region are criteria and “subjects” of critical analysis. The late twentieth century has woken up to a new threat: ecological disaster. The most important environmental problems that humankind faces *as a whole* are: nuclear war, depletion of valuable natural resources, population explosion, proliferation of exploitative technologies, conquest of space preliminary to using it as a garbage dump, pollution, extinction of species (though not a human problem) among others. In such a context, literary and cultural theory has begun to address the issue as a part of academic discourse. Numerous green movements have sprung up all over the world, and some have even gained representations in the governments.

Large scale debates over “dumping,” North versus South environmentalism (the necessary differences between the en-vironmentalism of the developed and technologically advanced richer nations—the North, and the poorer, subsistence environmentalism of the developing or “Third World”—the South). Donald Worster’s *Nature’s Economy* (1977) became a textbook for the study of ecological thought down the ages. The historian Arnold Toynbee recorded the effect of human civilisation upon the land and nature in his monumental, *Mankind and Mother Earth* (1976). Environmental issues and landscape use were also the concern of the *Annales School* of historians, especially Braudel and Febvre. The work of environmental historians has been pathbreaking too. Richard Grove et al’s massive *Nature and the Orient* (1998), David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha’s *Nature, Culture, Imperialism* (1995) have been significant work in the environmental history of India and Southeast Asia. Ramachandra Guha is of course the most important environmental historian writing from India today.

Various versions of environmentalism developed. Deep ecology and ecofeminism were two important developments. These new ideas questioned the notion of “development” and “modernity,” and argued that all Western notions in science, philosophy, politics were “anthropocentric” (human-centred) and “androcentric” (Man/male-centred). Technology, medical science with its animal testing, the cosmetic and fashion industry all came in for scrutiny from environmentalists. Deep ecology, for instance, stressed on a “biocentric” view (as seen in the name of the environmentalist group, “Earth First!!”).

Ecocriticism is the result of this new consciousness: that very soon, there will be nothing beautiful (or safe) in nature to discourse about, unless we are very careful.

Ecocritics ask questions such as:

- (1) How is nature represented in the novel/poem/play ?
- (2) What role does the physical-geographical setting play in the structure of the novel?
- (3) How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? That is, what is the link between pedagogic or creative practice and actual political, sociocultural and ethical behaviour towards the land and other non-human life forms?
- (4) How is science—in the form of genetic engineering, technologies of reproduction, sexualities—open to critical scrutiny terms of the effects of science upon the land?

The essential assumptions, ideas and methods of ecocritics may be summed up as follows.

- (1) Ecocritics believe that human culture is related to the physical world.

(2) Ecocriticism assumes that all life forms are interlinked. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere.

(3) Moreover, there is a definite link between nature and culture, where the *literary* treatment, representation and “thematization” of land and nature influence *actions* on the land.

(4) Joseph Meeker in an early work, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) used the term “literary ecology” to refer to “the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species.”

(5) William Rueckert is believed to have coined the term “ecocriticism” in 1978, which he defines as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature.”