

Postmodern trends in literature

Sunayna

English Literature, Lovely Professional University, Punjab

Abstract-Postmodernism refers to a literary movement which interrogates the idea of the existence of the ultimate reality or the absolute truth by rejecting the conventional literary styles being followed in literature during the Modern era. The word Postmodernism is a compound word which is obtained by adding the prefix Post to the term modernism and it signifies the ideas originating in the literary world during the aftermath of modern period or the period after World War II. Postmodernism, like many movements in literary theory, is an unorganized collection of ideas, principles, aesthetic values, and practices. The post World war literature is dominated by sense of disillusionment within the Modernist trends of literature caused by capitalism and World War. It is dominated by a variety of narrative techniques like Fragmentation, Pastiche, Intertextuality, Deconstruction and Parody.

Key Words: Literary, Postmodern, Modernism, Trends, Ideas

INTRODUCTION

An interesting aspect of postmodernism is its interconnection with different theories of culture. For example, postmodernism is influenced by the material approach to society and culture followed by Marxists. Postmodernist theories have significant impact on different subjects like philosophy, literature, linguistics, and film theory.

Modernism was a movement in arts and literature that strives to stand apart from traditions and conventions. As suggested by the name itself, the movement of modernism was aimed to introduce fresh ideology and thoughts. The modernist sentiment could be better adjudged from its mission; to 'make it new' (suggested by the American poet Ezra Pound). The modernist era existed along with the age of industrialization, capitalism, war, and colonialism. As a result, different narrative styles and philosophical standpoints were introduced by the writers of that age to bring innovative ideas in society. For example, modernist fiction is known for its individualism, experimentation, and stream-of-consciousness

technique of narration employed by James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1920) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) are among the important examples of the novels of the modernist era. But on the other hands, the Postmodernism movement in the literature emerged as a critique of modernity and modernist values. The postmodern era was mainly introduced in the 1960s by the prominent thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault. The term 'postmodern' gained prominence with the publication of the *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. Postmodern literary criticism constitutes of the theory of Deconstruction proposed by Jacques Derrida which criticizes Saussure's linguistics, a school of linguistics that looks at language as an arbitrary but self-sufficient system made up of interconnected signs. Another interesting aspect of Derrida's work is his breakdown of binary oppositions by challenging the implied hierarchy of the opposing pair, e.g., light/dark, man/woman. According to Derrida, these are not neutral opposites but equations of power where one is superior to its opposite. Along with this, a variety of other narrative techniques were adopted by the postmodern writers such as Fragmentation, playfulness and Intertextuality to emphasis the view of fragmented reality during the postmodern era. For example, Samuel Beckett's work *Theatre of the Absurd* emphasized the bilingual, idiosyncratic and tragicomic views. His another work, *Waiting For Godot* (1953), along with *Endgame* (1957), projected the element of realism along with the existentialism. Realism is a philosophical concept which perceives the independent existence of the things. Existential school of philosophy also looks upon the individuals as free beings capable of creating their own perspectives *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a seminal work of magic realism. Italo Calvino's novel. *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979) is a work of metafiction which

is another postmodern technique adopted by the writers. It provides a kind of direct address to the reader about the exercise of reading the book. Other example of postmodern trend named as Paradox can be seen in Joseph Heller's work *Catch-22* (1961). It is used to project a complicated narrative to the reader. Though the idea of employing the elements discussed above did not start with the postmodernists notwithstanding the fact that the modernists' works were also found to be often playful and ironic, Thus the themes and techniques like Irony, Playfulness, Metafiction and Pastiche occupied dominant place in several postmodern works. Also some other writers who later on became known as the postmodern writers such as several novelists later to be labeled postmodern were first collectively labeled Black Humorists. John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, Bruce Jay Friedman, etc. were earlier known as the black humorists Hence it would not be out of position, for the postmodernists to treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way: for example, the way Heller, Vonnegut, and Pynchon address the events of World War II. A good example of postmodern Irony and Black Humor is found in the stories of Donald Barthelme; "*The School*", for example, is about the ironic death of plants, animals, and people connected to the children in one class, but an arbitrary repetition of death is treated only as a joke and the narrator remains aloof in the entire plot. The central concept of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is the irony of the now-idiomatic "*Catch-22*", and the narrative is structured around a long series of similar ironies. Thomas Pynchon gives an instance of playfulness, within a serious context. Since postmodernism deals with the idea of the universe as an interplay of different connections. Hence the identity of individuals as a fractured one is projected through postmodernism. So it leads to the concept of decentered world which finds expression in the form of intertextuality which emphasizes the relationship between one text (a novel for example) and another or one text within the interwoven fabric of literary history. This postmodern literary style is commonly evident in works by Margaret Atwood, Donald Barthelme, and several other works in references to popular genres such as sci-fi and detective fiction. An early 20th century example of intertextuality which influenced later postmodernists is "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" by Jorge Luis Borges, a story with

significant references to Don Quixote which is also a good example of intertextuality with its references to Medieval romances. Don Quixote is a common reference with postmodernists, for example Kathy Acker's novel *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*. Another common postmodern style of writing is, pastiche which means to combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements. It can combine multiple genres to create a unique narrative: for example, William S. Burroughs uses science fiction, detective fiction, westerns; Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales; Umberto Eco uses detective fiction, fairy tales, and science fiction, Derek Pell relies on collage and noir detective, erotica, travel guides, and how-to manuals, and so on. In Robert Coover's 1977 novel *The Public Burning*, Coover mixes historically inaccurate accounts of Richard Nixon interacting with historical figures and fictional characters such as Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker. Fabulation is another postmodern trend which seems similar to metafiction. It relates to pastiche and Magic Realism. Fabulation challenges some traditional ideas of literature regarding the traditional structure of a novel or role of the narrator, thereby integrating a few traditional principles of storytelling, including fantastical elements, such as magic and myth, or it considers elements from popular genres such as science fiction. The term was coined by Robert Scholes in his book *The Fabulators*. A good example of fabulation is Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to to the modernists' view of the author as an enlightening creator of the ideal world, the postmodernists' literary trend shunned meaning and celebrated fragmentation, decenteredness and disorder as a new reality of individual life. It led to a major shift in literary techniques adopted by the writers during the 20th century. The work of the writers such as John Bath, Samuel Becket, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnigut along with many other writers contributed to the postmodern literature notably in establishing the new narrative techniques in the work of fiction.

REFERENCES

- [1] Margaret Atwood. *Postmodern Literature Guide: 10 Notable Postmodern Authors*. 7 June 2021.

- [2] ‘‘Postmodern Literary Theory.’’*Www. study smarter.co.uk*.
- [3] Sharma, Ramen, and Dr. Preeti Choudhary.’’ Common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature of Shakespeare.’’ *International Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, vol.1, no.2, 2011, pp.189-198.