

Is there Meta – Modernism in Literature? : A Literary Case Study

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Abstract: In literature and cultural studies off late Postmodernism has had domineering and attractive impact during 1960s and 1990s. Still, critics of art and literature articulate on postmodern influences. Modernism is said to be believed that it has become a byword of demise of its modernity. But then, even though modernism has gone off, the modernity is prevalent in the art and culture.

Keywords: Modernity, Meta, Post-Theory, Parody

The convergent and the divergent aspects of various segments in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* are analyzed comparatively. The diasporic writers of India; Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie and an American postmodern writer, Pynchon criticize politics, history and culture with the use of techniques like parody and the peculiar language of their own. Tharoor uses many metaphors, similes, and allusions but Rushdie uses the coinages of his own. Both the writers have used non linear narration. Pynchon uses linear narration, scientific words and the aspects of detective mode. In America, Pynchon has contributed much to Postmodernism as Tharoor and Rushdie have done in India. In the three novels, the themes are varied at certain stages.

The target of these writers is to 'disseminate the theme of dissatisfaction'. It is stated that a country is bound with culture, history and politics. These writers criticize culture, history and politics, in order to proclaim that Postmodernism is not under any institution. These authors have made an indirect mention of gala attitude of 'singularity in pluralism and plurality in singularity'. Jean Baudrillard says that postmodernism is 'anything it goes'. It is better understood that multiaccentuality of themes and techniques can be accommodated in a text. Thomas Pynchon is a postmodern writer and his shortest novel *The Crying of Lot 49* is a typical epitome of postmodernism. In the novel, the protagonist, Oedipa undergoes a series of searching attitude. It could be said as the Romance in the old sense of the term. In these three novels *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* postcoloniality, diasporic element, post modernity, allusion, parody, mocking attitude and deconstruction are traced out. In *The Crying of Lot 49* metafiction and parodizing practice are traced out. Parody of Californian culture is depicted through the character, Oedipa. Even in *The Great Indian Novel* and *Midnight's Children*, it is said that metafiction and parody are interwoven. In India, by the reading of these two novels. *The Great Indian Novel* and *Midnight's Children*, one can come to know that the politico-history is a foundation to make postmodern novel successful. But in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the American culture is mocked at by the author. In this novel, open-ended conclusion is deliberately given, because, towards the end Oedipa finds nothing and there is no concrete conclusion. Rushdie and Tharoor are not very particular about the correctness of the year in the novels.

When a historian writes his story, he or she has to be very particular about the dates and events. But these two writers are not doing so to weave with fictionality. The technique of postmodernism has left it to the readers to comprehend the themes. They are not determined by technique by any means. But techniques produce the plurality of meaning. Though every writer has his own style in postmodern literature, these three authors have used parody, metafiction, intertextuality, pastiche and mocking element uniformly.

Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* are taken for the postmodern critical study. In *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* Indian history politics and myths are focused. Myths are the basic elements for structuralism. Structuralism is the condition of a society. Tharoor and Rushdie have used these structural elements in *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* in order to parody modernism. But racial discrimination and caste-oriented problems are not focused in large measure. Modernism accepts the Grand narration. Postmodernism celebrates little narration. South Indian history has a little role to play in *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*.

Tharoor uses *the Mahabharata* to write *The Great Indian Novel*. Hindus believe the *Mahabharata* to be a social justice epic and it mends the wrong ways of the people. In the researcher's point of view *The Great Indian Novel* is also bound with Grand narration. Grand narration can accept religious oriented narration. *The Mahabharata* is venerated by the Hindu people, but Tharoor uses it as a technique of intertextuality to parody the modern political scenario. Tharoor depends on *The Mahabharata* to produce postmodern text. To comprehend the story and techniques of *The Great Indian Novel* a reader must have read *The Mahabharata*. *The Mahabharata* is a structuralist text: structuralism has a ideology of 'structuring'. Structuring means that a myth is created by a man.

The same myth forms a man. Therefore a gain there is a n element of modernism. From this point of view, a reader is forced to read *The Mahabharata* along with Indian political situation. There is a concoction of Epistemology and ontology in these three novels: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*. The

dualities revealed by Pynchon, Rushdie and Tharoor. In *Midnight's Children* the racial discrimination and caste-oriented problems have less place to remain. Rushdie also deals with Indian politics, religion of Islam and myth in *Midnight's Children*. Indian novels and the diasporic: *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* deal with myth and culture.

The act of swapping the children born on the eve of Indian Independence and their possession of magical powers are the stem of the novel, *Midnight's Children*. The quasi-autobiographical elements are traced in *Midnight's Children*. Human psyche magic and enjoys it in vain. As such, when a reader reads a novel of magical realism, he or she enjoys it. In accordance with *Midnight's Children*, there are two elements of magical realism traced out:

- i) Magic stands for enjoyment
- ii) Reality stands for facing

Taking a cue from these two facing the enjoyment is the primary aim of the technique called magical realism. Tharoor has used *Mahabharata* as a supporting material to describe with parody Indian politics and mythical elements. From this point of view, a reader can understand that *The Great Indian Novel* is a post-colonial writing. The reason for that writing is that the great Indian epic *The Mahabharata* has a vital role in Indian English Novel. Without having the knowledge of Mahabharata and Indian history, a reader can find it difficult to understand the meaning of *The Great Indian Novel*.

This is a kind of strategy used by Tharoor to re-fix the Indian great epic *The Mahabharata* in *The Great Indian Novel*. This is how a reader can find the practice of decolonization in Indian English writing. This de-colonization can also be called seeking for 'identity' in 'identity crisis'. From this point of view, postmodernism also has elements of modernity to establish itself as a postmodern text. Grand Narration or Meta narration can be defined as:

- i. Religious-oriented Narration
- ii. Systematic Narration
- iii. Well-structured Narration
- iv. A package of difficult term: Terms of myth, terms of cyber language, and terms of science. On the contrary, little narration means that an ordinary reader can understand a text or a work of art easily. Little narration is meant for pulp-literature. There is a combat between little narration and grand narration. The following classification can make a reader understand clearly:
 - Modernism vs. Postmodernism
 - Grand/Meta Narration vs. Little Narration
 - Elite people vs. Ordinary people

The researcher has found that the postmodern text itself depicts the amalgamation and continuation of modernity. At this juncture there is a sign for the difference between 'Modernism' and 'Modernity'. Modernism is defined as new and elite. Modernity means the quality of modernism. The quality of modernism can stem from the elements of modernism. This act is called 'pastiche' in postmodern terms.

In *Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*, the presence of 'pastiche' is found.

A reader can understand the romantic poetry, because romanticism has its own identity. Again, a reader can understand classicism because of its identity in a work of art. Apart from postmodern text, a reader can call out the meaning and know the identity either through technique, which involves language or the particular period, which involves history. But the postmodern text accepts all kinds of writing techniques. Therefore postmodernism paves a path to techniques. As far as the researcher is concerned, *Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* have so much scope to say that these are typical postmodern novels. But Thomas Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* can take a higher position to be called a quasi-postmodern novel. By bearing the label of postmodern novel, *Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* give more emphasis upon modernism and modernist novels. That is why the researcher has found that postmodern period which lasted long, is, from 1960 to 1990. These thirty years have made some important changes in literature. In spite of thirty years of celebration, these years depend on the previous modern era. This research goes beyond the general opinion of typical postmodern novels.

Heterogeneity is the primary stimulation to attain success in postmodern novels. Heterogeneity is mixed with various systems and narrations. These research focuses on techniques. The reason for giving importance to techniques is that postmodern writers are conscious to bring out the unconscious. By this point of view Thomas Pynchon, Rushdie and Tharoor are giving importance to techniques consciously.

To some extent these writers have forgotten to affix the historical date correctly. At one point Pynchon, Rushdie and Tharoor have maintained to parody culture, society and human life of meaninglessness in *Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*. Humor is different from parody. Parody is to show one's dissatisfaction and mocking one's culture and society. As for the different themes discussed earlier in this research, Pynchon could have used a male character in the place of Oedipa. On the contrary Pynchon has used a female character 'Oedipa'. This kind of characterization is also one of the themes in postmodernism specifically called 'feminism', when a reader reads a novel through 'Oedipa'. Therefore Oedipa, a female character is emphasized. The postmodern themes deal with beyond race, culture, religion especially ISA and RSA. But in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*, one can find the impact of the author's religion.

Diasporic influence is also found in *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*. Rushdie and Tharoor have witnessed diasporicity by mentioning the historical dates and events. Myth and epic are in the state of timeliness. But the very term 'myth' is still needed to shape the society and culture, but the meaning and different notions are there in myth. Myth can shape human being partially, not fully. Because the development of modernism is still taking place, modernism replaces postmodernism again in the world.

Modernism has witnessed scientific development and mass killing. Both are even now possible. The emergence of postmodern fiction proclaims the 'death of Eliotization'. Even though Eliotization is over his era of modernism is still there both in postmodernism and in post-theory era. Postmodern themes and techniques accept allusions, parody and cross references. These elements are used to understand that the text is postmodernism based. If postmodernism has given freedom to the people and liberty to write for maintaining the human wishes, the text also should give liberty to the reader to understand. But the researcher has found that in the postmodern texts: *Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*, again there is advent for re-visiting difficult and technical terms.

There is not a big difference between modern text and postmodern text. In order to draw a dichotomy between modern text and postmodern text these three writers have deliberately (consciously) used the technique called 'metafiction'. Postmodernism is associated with local color. And the literature of postmodernism also belongs to its period. Bringing in his context of local color and biographical influence, Rushdie is much more influenced by Islamic religion and Indian politics. Therefore postmodern literature is also the continuity of the former ideologies and is based on modern ideologies. Just because Pynchon has studied physical engineering, he is influenced by the scientific terms and knowledge. The novels taken for the study: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* have once again a modern way of narration. Modernism stands for rationalism; postmodernism stands for enjoyment. Postmodern readers need to have modern intellectualism to understand the postmodern text. That is why postmodernism can be called by the researcher a 'meta-modernism'. Meta-modernism means that postmodernism retells about modernism and its qualities. In short it is better understood that postmodernism is about modernism. This ideology is seen in these novels that are taken for the study. In the evolution of meta-modernism the researcher can find on the more term called meta-parody. Postmodernism is parody about modernism. This is why parody has a vital role to play in postmodernism. When a reader reads a postmodern novel, he/she can have knowledge of modernism. The postmodern novel is not necessary to parody modernism. In the name of parodying modernism, it is better understood that it is a self-parody. Postmodernism it is a self-parody. Parody, meta-parody and self-parody are found in the three novels: *Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*.

It is found that postmodern text itself is a self-contradiction rather than self-reflexivity. Self-contradiction is found in these three postmodern novels. In accordance with postmodernism, new historicism is also one of the terms or schools. New historicism acknowledges that every sign is called a 'text'. The term like parody, meta-parody and meta-modernism can give a clear meaning towards the reading of the postmodern text. Postmodernism accepts that anything is possible in the world. All the literatures are produced from the society. There is a relation between the literary object and the society. Literature has a vital role to play in shaping the society. If it fails to do it, it is a mere sign. Postmodern work is beyond the tradition and culture.

A literary text belongs to its culture. Even though a work speaks beyond the culture, it is to be understood that a work belongs to its culture. Likewise a modern work belongs to modern era and postmodern text belongs to postmodern era. Therefore a postmodern text itself is bound with culture. Once again modernism and modernity revisit in the form of literary work as well as in real life. Postmodern critics and writers are against Auschwitz and therefore through the text, postmodern writers provide pleasure for the readers. Even now the same genocide was also witnessed in Sri Lanka. Nearly about one lakh Tamilians were killed and the people who are alive are still in the camp. Either in modernism or postmodernism the same event is taking place. Therefore postmodern texts have given no influence or impact on the society to lead a life with peace. The draw back in postmodern text is a technique called 'metafiction'.

Because, metafiction makes a reader think that he is reading a novel. The question is why such an attitude? If a reader thinks that he or she is reading a novel, after finishing a novel of postmodernism, there is no impact on it or on the society. How to understand a postmodern text? with reference to: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*. To understand postmodern text is to comprehend the postmodern text, in two aspects of knowledge:

- Knowledge about modernism, and
- Knowledge about postmodern techniques.

According to these two statements, the researcher has used a hyphenated term meticulously. That is 'bi-episteme-modernism'. Lyotard's ideology 'incredulity towards metanarration' has fewer places to establish in literature, as long as traditional and social institution, and mythical importance are there in the society. Therefore the element of metanarration is still prevalent even in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*. The fusion and employment of historical characters compared with, reflect that magical reality. Magical reality is one of the techniques which deface history. History has its own valuable place. When a magical reality is applied, the particular history becomes less-meaningless. In *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor has used the word 'messiah'. Messiah means a person who saves or redeems. This word is questionable. From which clutches has Tharoor redeemed?

The Mahabharata has godly characterization.

Gods and political powers are the magisterial ones. Again *The Great Indian Novel* goes back to ancient culture and authority. Crossing the border of culture and authority is called postmodern element. On the contrary, these writers reiterate the elements of modernity. From this point of view, postmodernism is called meta-modernism or meta-parody. At the same time postmodern literature or art is a mixture of many elements. The very word heterogeneous can be apt to mention here. Postmodernism alone may not be able to give or produce heterogeneous nature in literary work. One can understand that the term heterogeneous can be found in every product of literature. Just because there is a word play and the signification of different signs deal with heterogeneity, Pynchon, Rushdie and Tharoor are very

conscious about narrating a story through the important characters, Oedipus in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Saleem in *Midnight's Children* and Ganesh in *The Great Indian Novel*. The important characters are dominating in narrating the story even in the postmodern novels. When talking about decentering the authority, the authority is centered even in postmodern novels. That is why the researcher has found out the meta-parody. Moreover the concept of self-contradiction is also found. When talking about plurality of meaning, a reader can apply any theory to cultivate multi-meanings in any text belonging to any era. But in the postmodern text, it need not apply any theory to cultivate meanings of pluri-kind. Just because postmodernism is a self-contradiction, meanings can be produced in different ways. Virtual reality is also celebrated in postmodern novels. Virtual reality can lead to a new world, where people can find enjoyment. Four basic ideologies can be traced out in these three novels taken for the study: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*. With relation to virtual reality, the readers of postmodern texts feel that they are between reality and non-reality. To sustain this mixed ideology of reality and non-reality, the researcher has found out the following ideologies

The ideologies of postmodern world that lead to New-world

- Losing memory
- The new messiah
- Disappointment
- Lack of spirituality

These are the tracks to lead to postmodern world. The following 'IF' table has four major techniques and has raised questions:

Table-2

SL IF Question

- IF1 Parody What is the necessity of it?
 IF2 Metafiction Why should a reader feel he/she reads a novel?
 IF3 Just fiction celebration Why is there no influence?
 IF4 Intertextuality What is meant by intertextuality?

The researcher has consolidated these terms under important postmodern techniques. In postmodern text, meanings cannot be interpreted by the author, but it is up to the readers. On the contrary, the author has a vital role to play to lead a reader to find out and understand the meanings by a unique technique.

1) IF1 - Parody

Parody is not a new term. It has no authoritative place to be played in postmodernism. Parody gives the unread meaning in modernism which has not satisfied the people in the world. The disappointment and dissatisfaction are once again portrayed in the form of meta-parody in the postmodern text.

2) IF2 - Metafiction

An author must have a relationship with a reader. Similarly the reader must have relationship with the author. The concept of dissatisfaction and

disappointments to feel the previous era's modernism and to change. On the contrary Pynchon, Rushdie and Tharoor have used the technique 'meta-fiction'. Metafiction gives a dichotomy between the reader and the author in terms of the reader reading a novel. Why does the author make that kind of parting-line? If a literary object is produced from the society, it should have a relationship with the society. The relationship also cuts off by the technique 'metafiction'.

3) IF3 - Just a fiction celebration

Again this ideology goes back to Arts for Art's sake. It means that a novel remains as a novel. If it is just fiction, it means that the author's unconscious narrativity can be read by the conscious reader. The use of just fiction is a kind of escapism. This sort of technique also may come under 'meta-modernism'.

4) IF4 - Intertextuality

Literary text may be created by cyclical processes. It means that it goes back to old one or origin. Intertextuality includes influences, references and sources. By using intertextuality the concept of escapism is present. The postmodern text, which has 'intertextuality', is innovative or creative with irregularity. That is why Tharoor has used 'Intertextuality'. The researcher has used hyphenated words such as: meta-modernism and meta-parody. While the readers are talking about 'meta-modernism' or 'meta-parody' the era of postmodernism or postmodern texts can be understood. That is why the researcher has found that, a reader of postmodernism can have the epistemology of modernism, postmodern techniques and narrativity. This interlink can be called 'pastiche'. Further scope of the research can be in the following areas: New Historicism and Post-Theory can be applied to interpret the meanings and themes in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*.

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