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 dominating 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 com paratively. The diasporic writers of India; Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie and an ‘Am erican’ postmodern writer, Pynchon criticise ze 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 narrative. Pynchon uses linear narrative, scientific words and the aspects of definitive mode. In America, Pynchon has contributed much to Postmodernism as Tharoor and Rushdie have done in In dia. In th e three novels, the themes are re varied at certain stages.

The targ et of these writers is to disseminate the profoundness of ‘dissatisfaction’. It is stated that a country is bound with culture, history and politics. These writers criticise culture, history and politics, in order to proclaim that Postmodernism is not under any in stitution. Th ese au thors have made an indirect mention of ‘gal a attitude of singularity in pluralism and pluralism in singul arism’. Jean Baud rillard says that postmodernism is ‘anything it goes’. It is better understood that m ultiaccentuality of thematic natures can be accommodated in a text. Thomas Pynchon’s postmodern writer and his shortest novel The Crying of Lot 49 is a typical postmodern novel. In it no one, th e protagonist, Oedipa undergoes a series of searching attitude. It could be said as the Romance in the old sense of the term. In th ese 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 ‘California’ culture is depicted through the character, Oe dipa. Even in The Great Indian Novel and Midnight’s Children, it is said that at 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 the political that homo- history is a foundation to make postmodern novel successful. But in The Crying of Lot 49, the American culture is mocked by the author. In this novel, open-ended conclusion is deliberately given, because towards the end Oe dipa finds nothing and there is no concrete conclusion. Rushdie and Tharoor are not very particular about the correctness of the yearin the novels.

When a historian writes history, he or she has to be ve ry particular about the dates and events. But these two writers are not doing so to weave with fictionalisation. The technique of postmodernism has left it to the readers to comprehend the themes. They are not det ermined by techniques by any means. But techniques produce plurality of meaning. Though iver R er th e学家 has his o wn st yle in n p ostmodern 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 Sashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel are taken for postmodern criticism study. In Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel, literary politics and myths are focused. Myths are the basic st ructural elements. Structuralism is the condition of history and politics and myths are focused. Myths are the basic elements in Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel. In order to produce an edg e, B ut racial discrimination and cast e-oriented problems are not focused in large m easure. Mode kim mis accepts the Grand narrat ion. Postmodernism ce lebrates little narrat ion. South Indian history has a little role to play in Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel.

Tharoor uses the Mahabharatha to write The Great Indian Novel. Hindus believe the Mahabharatha to be a social justice epic and it mends the w rong ways of the people. In th e researcher’s point of view The Great Indian Novel is also bound with Grand narration. Grand narration carries pt religious oriented narration. The Mahabharatha is venerated by the Hindu people, but Tharoor uses it as a technique of inter tex tuality to produce the postmodern text. To comprehend the story and techniques of The Great Indian Novel, a reader must have rea d The Mahabharatha. The Mahabharatha is a structuralist text: structuralism has a i deology of structuring. Structuring means that a myth is created by a man.

The same myth forms a man. T herefore a gain the re is a n element of modernism. From this point of view, a read er is forced to read The Mahabharatha along with Ind ian political situation. T here is a conc ersion of E pistemology and d ontology in these novels: The Crying of Lot 49, Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel. The
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 magic realism, he or she enjoys it. In accordance with *Midnight's Children*, there are two elements of magical realism traced out:

- Magic stands for enjoyment
- Reality stands for facing

Taking a cue from these two, the enjoyment is the primary aim of the technique called magical realism. Tharoor has used *Mahabharatha* as a sup-porting 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 this writing is that the *great Indian epic* *The Mahabharatha* has a vital role in Indian English Novel. Without having the knowledge of *Mahabharatha* 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 Mahabharatha* in *The Great Indian Novel*. This is how a reader can find the practice of de-colonization 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:

- Religious-oriented Narration
- Systematic Narration
- Well-structured Narration
- 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 postmodern text accepts all kinds of writing techniques. The refore post modernism paves a path to techniques. As far as the researcher is concerned, in *Crying of Lot 49, Midnight's Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* give more emphasis on postmodernism and an d 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 celebratio n, these years depend on the he pre vious m odern era. T his resea rcher 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 ocuses on techniques. The reason for giving importance to techniques is that postmodern writers are conscious to bring out the meaning and know the identity either through technique, or the particular period, or, which involves l'amour or the particular period, or, which involves history. But the posmorrow text accepts all kinds of writing techniques. Thus, one can find the practice of de-colonization 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:

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Modernism has witnessed scientific development and mass killing. Nothing can be ev, en no w p possible. The en e merge of postmodern fiction proclaims the detachment of Eliotization. Even though Eliotization is over his era of modernism is still there both in n p ostmodernism and in post-theory era. Postmodern themes and techni ques 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 p eople and liberty to write for maintaining the human wishes, the text also should give liberty to the reader to understand. But the research er has found that in the postmodern text to: 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 t ext and a postmodern text. In order to draw a dichotomy between modern text and postmodern text these three writers have deliberately ( consciously) used the technique called ‘self-metacriticism’. Postmodernism is associated with local color. And the litera ture in postmodernism also belongs to its period. B ringing in this context of local color, a nd biographical influence, Rushdie is much more influenced by Islamic religion and In dian politics. Therefore postmodern literature is also the continuity of the former ideologies and is base don modern i deologies. Just beca use Rushdie has studied p hysical engi neering, he is influenced by the scientific terms and an kno wledge. Th e novel s tak en for the e study: The Crying of Lot 49, Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel have once again modernist way of narration. Modernism stands for rationalism; postmodernism stands for obj ectivism. Postmodern writers 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 neo re mercall ed m eta-parody. Postmodernism is a parody about modernism. Th is is wh y 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-p parody. Postmodernism it is a self-p parody. Parody, meta-parody and self-parody are found in these three novels: Crying of Lot 49, Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel.

It is found that postmodern text itself is a self-con tradiction rather than a self-re vivity. Self-contradiction is found in these three post modern no vels. In a con currence with postmodernism, new hi storicism is also one of the terms or schools. New hi storicism ack owledges that every sign is valuable place. When a mag ical reality is applied, the text also reflects that mag ical reality. Magical reality is one of the important elements in literature. The Great Indian Novel, The Mahabharata has godly characterization.

A literary text belongs to its cuture. En e enough a wo rk 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. Po stmodern critics and writers are against Auschwitz and th erefore they ugh the text, post modern writers provide pl ease for t he rea der. 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 vent is taking place. There fore postmodern texts have given no influence or impact on the society to lead a life with h escape. Th e t he text is a technique called ‘self-metacriticism’.

Because, metacriticism makes a reader think that he is reading a novel. The question is why su ch 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 the society. How does one 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 he postmodern t ext, i nt wo a spects of knowledge:

a. Knowledge about modernism, and
b. Knowledge about postmodern techniques.

According to these two statements, the researcher has used a hyphenated term etmatically. Th at is ‘b i-epistememodernism’. Lyo tard’s sideo logy ‘in credibility towards metanarration’ has few places to establish in literature, as long as traditional and so cial in stitution, an d m ythical 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 em ployment of hi storical characters compared with, reflect that at mag ical reality. Mag ical reality is one of the techniques which define history. History has its own valuable place. When a m agical reality is applied, t he par tic ular history becomes less-meaningless. In The Great Indian Novel, Tharoor has used the word ‘messiah’. Messiah means a pe r son who save s or redeem s. Thi s word i s questionable. From which clutch es has Tharoor redeemed?

The Mahabharata has godly characterization.

Gods and political powers are t he m agisterial ones. A gain The Great Indian Novel goes back to anc ient culture and au thority. Crossing the border of cutu re and au thority is called postmodem elem ent. On the contrary, these writers reiterate the elements of modernity. From this point of view, postmodernism is called meta-modernism or m eta-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 t et m heterogeneous can be found in every product of literature. Just because there is a word play and t he si g nification of di f ferent si gns deal wi th heterogeneity, Py nchon, R ushdie and D T haroor are very
conscious about narrating a story through the important characters, Oe dipa 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 postmodern novels. When talking about decentering the authority, the author 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 plurality. 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

1. Losing memory
2. The new messiah
3. Disappointment
4. Lack of spirituality

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

#### Table-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL</th>
<th>IF Question</th>
<th>Question(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>IF1 Parody</td>
<td>What is the necessity of it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>IF2 Metafiction</td>
<td>Why should a reader feel he/she reads a novel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>IF3 Just fiction celebration</td>
<td>Why is there no influence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IF4 Intertextuality</td>
<td>What is meant by intertextuality?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The researcher has consolidated these terms under important postmodern techniques. In postmodern texts, meanings cannot be interpreted by the author, but it is up to the 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 etaparody in the postmodern text.

2. **IF2 - Metafiction**
   
   An author must have a relationship with a reader. Similarly, the reader must have a relationship with the author. The concept of dissatisfaction and disappointments to feel the previous era’s m odernism and to change. O n the contrary Py nchon, Rushdie and Tharoor have used d t e t echnique “m eta-fiction”. M eta fiction gi ves a di chotomy between t he r eader a nd t he author in terms of the reader reading a novel. Why does the author make that kind of 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 th e ideology go es back to Ar ts for Ar ts’ 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 original. Intertextuality includes influences, refereces and sources. By using intertextuality the concept of escapism is prenet. The postmodern texts lead to intertextuality, in which “inter” is novative or creative writing irregularity. That is why Th e reader can understand that a reader of postmodernism can have the epistemology of modernism; postmodern techniques and narrativity. This inter link can be called ‘pastiche’. Further scope of the research can be in the following areas: New Historicism and Po-st-Theory can be applied to interpret the meanings and themes in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Midnight’s Children* and *The Great Indian Novel*.

### References


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