

Chapter -1

Postmodernist Narrative: Text and Context

Fiction is a genre that irresistibly depicts the contemporary culture and creative consciousness of a specific era. Postmodern fiction embraces cultural consciousness as well as prevailing literary and philosophical tendencies. Bakhtin points out in *The Dialogic Imagination* that the world has become polyglot and the novel actively creates polyglot world – something that is quite opposed to the previous tendencies in all the genres as they used to represent ‘eras of closed and deaf monoglossia’ (12). He further suggests, “In contrast to other major genres, the novel emerged and matured precisely when intense activation of external and internal polyglossia was at its peak of its activity; this is its native element” (12). If the postmodern culture is observed, it can be found that the postmodern world is fraught with the horrors of the world wars, inundated with technology and products of mass consumption and affected by the manipulative power of mass media.

Against the backdrop of the most gruesome wars, hyper-skepticism, and subsequent decenteredness, postmodernism evolves. In other words, it is a transmogrification of the hyper-skepticism begun in the Enlightenment and given a huge impetus by influential thinkers such as Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. The two world wars produced carnage that the world had never witnessed before. They shook the traditional boundaries of thinking and forced the people to think beyond conventional idealism. Many millions of lives were lost around the world. Plaguing the human psyche, these two wars have influenced modernism and postmodernism more than any other events. This is how the existing seeds of enlightenment transmogrify into heavy doubts. Modernism and postmodernism emerge from the decentering

events as well as from the hyper-skepticism. Mass communication tools, further, supplement the influence of the hyper-skepticism. New technologies such as films and other multimedia tools of modern communication provide a bigger megaphone for artists to express their unsettling message.

The unsettling voices, which emerged from Heidegger and Nietzsche, dismantle the entire belief system concerning religious faiths and philosophical assumptions of the west. The postmodernists adapt the nihilistic approach endorsed by these philosophers. What we get from Heidegger is the fact that he streamlines postmodern thought to be presented by the late generation into a nihilistic mode. Some of his concepts rooted in postmodernism are: the elements of conflict and contradiction concerning reality, reason as impotent in getting us to truth about reality, and the metaphysical nihilism that is found in postmodern thinkers such as Derrida or Foucault. Stephen Hicks highlights the postmodern stance to these predecessors to the postmodernists. He suggests:

Metaphysically, though, the postmodernists will drop the remnants of Heidegger's metaphysical quest for Being, and put Nietzschean power struggles at the core of our being. And especially in the cases of Foucault and Derrida, most postmodernists will abandon Nietzsche's sense of the exalted potential of man and embrace Heidegger's anti-humanism (67).

Postmodernism is marked by the philosophical void. Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein bore the seeds of nihilism upon which postmodernism developed. This philosophical void is one of the major moments of postmodernism. Critics like Rorty have already suggested the end of philosophical justifications in relation to the universal concepts of

truth or reality. Postmodernism suggests that there is no universal truth in the world, there are multiple truths instead of one dominant truth, and these truths change in time. This philosophical void is common in both modernism and postmodernism. This is the reason why they cannot be discussed separately.

Both philosophically and culturally, postmodernism has its roots in modernism as it evolves out of it, and there are stark differences in the two movements. Postmodernism is a movement of the second half of the twentieth century that gives prominence to fragmentation and celebrates it openly as opposed to modernism that regretted fragmentation and showed a deep nostalgia for the unity and the center. Postmodernism accepts fragmentation as a liberating force, which frees from the conventional unity and fixed system of beliefs. It rejects the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' art, which was prevalent in modernism. It, further, disdains modernist asceticism as elitist and mixes 'high' and 'popular' art. Christopher Butler states in this regard:

It is often simply unconcerned by the relationship between the formerly 'high' and 'low' genres, for example as expressed in the two symphonies *Low* (1992) and *Heroes* (1997) by Philip Glass based on the work of David Bowie and Brian Eno, and it can often look quite trivial and popular and tacky. An alliance with popular culture is seen as anti-elitist, anti-hierarchical, and dissenting (64).

Modernism with its experimental spirit denounced and rejected the conventional writing practices that were followed by the realist writers of the earlier era such as chronological plots, continuous narratives, authenticity of omniscient narrators, and closed endings in a work of art. The modernist writers gave a new kind of emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, i.e., how we see rather than what we see. This phenomenon came to be known as stream of consciousness

technique. Further, as a part of experimentation and innovation, the writers started blurring the distinction between several genres. The poem and the novel started asking the questions of its own creation and existence, a technique, which came to be known as self-reflexiveness. The realistic conventions of previous eras were denounced and rejected by the modern writers. Some of the English writers of that era are T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, and Gertrude Stein, and the French and the German writers are Marcel Proust, Stephane Mallarme, Andre Gide, Franz Kafka, and Rainer Maria Rilke.

Postmodern writers also follow the literary practices that were followed by the modernist writers. The difference is marked in the mood of the two movements. T S Eliot, a modernist representative, says in *The Waste Land*, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” and expresses lament, pessimism, and despair about the world in the fragmented art forms. Contrary to this, the postmodern writers celebrate this fragmentation recognizing it as an exhilarating and a liberating phenomenon.

Modernism is known for its fierce asceticism that neglected and renounced the overelaborate art forms of the nineteenth century art forms. For example, the poems of Ezra Pound were reduced to one impressionistic observation and Samuel Beckett’s plays were confined to fifteen minutes with just one speaker. On the other hand, the postmodernists do not believe in any kind of high or low art and disdain the ascetic attitude of modernist writers. In a postmodern work, there is no distinction between surface and depth. Postmodernism has been distinct from modernism and numerous differences can be traced between them.

Habermas, Lyotard and Baudrillard are postmodern thinkers who correspond and contradict with each other in their attempt to define postmodernism. Habermas presents in his essay that

modernism begins with the Enlightenment of the mid-seventeenth and continues to the mid-eighteenth century. He asserts that, “the project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic” (9). He emphasizes the power of reason as a tool to improve human society. The Enlightenment period breaks away with tradition, blind habit, and slavish obedience to religious precepts. It promotes reason as an application that can bring about solutions to the problems of society. He notes, “this spirit of aesthetic modernity has recently begun to age. It has been recited once more in the 1960s; after the 1970s, however, we must admit to ourselves that this modernism arouses a much fainter response today than it did fifteen years ago” (6). For Habermas, this faith in reason and the possibility of progress survives in the twentieth century. He calls Derrida and Foucault as ‘young conservatives’, for they represent a repudiation of this kind of enlightenment and a rejection of faith in reason.

Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* rejects ‘metanarratives’ which are illusions and no longer tenable in the present time. Lyotard calls Habermas’ ‘Modernity - an Incomplete Project’ as a futile metanarrative which resides beside the previous metanarratives such as Christianity, Marxism and the myth of scientific progress. Metanarratives are totalizing explanation of the things of the world and they are cultivated to smother or suppress differences, oppositions, and plurality. Lyotard, showing incredulity towards these metanarratives, offers multiple ‘mininarratives’, which are provisional and relative in nature. According to Lyotard, they provide a basis for the actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances. While referring to the Encyclopedia of German idealism, Lyotard notes, “But what it produces is a metanarrative, for the story’s narrator must not be a people mired in

the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge, nor even scientists taken as a whole, since they are sequestered in professional frameworks corresponding to their respective specialities” (34).

As per the minimalist designs and an active rejection of the domineering notions or metanarratives, the task of the postmodernists is to refute the coalition of reason and power as this coalition leads to the creation of metanarratives that suppress the other. As Stephen R. C. Hicks in his book, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* points out that:

Those horrors, according to postmodernism, are most prominent in the west, Western civilization being where reason and power have been the most developed. But the pain of those horrors is neither inflicted, nor suffered equally. Males, whites, and the rich have their hands on the whip of power, and they use it cruelly at the expense of women, racial minorities, and the poor (3).

Because of the coalition of reason and power, there is a brutal cruelty against women, racial minorities and the poor. They are the victims of this prevailing social system. Critics like Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon have already raised their voices against the psychological cruelty enforced by the males. They call for the censorship of pornography on postmodern grounds. According to them, our social reality constructed through language and pornography creates a violent and domineering reality for women. Pornography is not a free speech, but a political oppression. The case is same with the poor and the minorities; the oppression of the poor by the rich and the oppression of the struggling nations by the developed nations. Lyotard suggests that Saddam Hussein is a victim and spokesperson of American imperialism. In the name of the myth of progress, collective freedom, and equality, these oppressions are carried out.

Another major theorist of postmodernism is the contemporary French writer Jean Baudrillard who is known for his theoretical concept 'the loss of the real'. In contemporary life, the pervasive influence of images from film, TV, and advertising have led to the loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, and surface and depth. The result is a culture of 'hyperreality', in which distinctions between them are eroded. Butler mentions this phenomenon:

We are simply enclosed in a media-dominated world of signs, villainously generated by capitalism to synthesize our desires, which only really refer to one another within an entrapping chain of ideas. They are mere simulacra, which replace real things and their actual relationships (only truly known to those on the left, who see through such illusions) in a process which Baudrillard calls 'hyperrealization' (114).

In his essay, 'Simulacra and Simulations', Baudrillard questions this very possibility of the sign that could signify the underlying reality, and presents a new concept in which a sign does not represent depth or reality but another sign. He calls this whole system as simulacrum. He suggests the widespread existence of 'simulacrum' through the reference of God as a part of the system of 'simulacrum',

This is precisely because they predicted this omnipotence of simulacra, the faculty simulacra have of effacing God from the conscience of man, and the destructive, annihilating truth that they allow to appear - that deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum - from this came their urge to destroy the images (*Simulacra and Simulation* 4).

He explains the concept of reality in the postmodern era with the help of a few models. He presents the concept of sign hiding the absent with an example of Disneyland. Disneyland of America creates a kind of simulation that forces people to believe that the whole of America is the macrocosm of Disneyland negating the depth or hidden reality. Disneyland is presented as an imaginary thing in order to make us believe that the rest is real. In postmodernism, the distinction between the real and the simulated collapses. Everything is simply a model, an image, or an endless surface without depths. This culture generates the status of the hyperreal. While referring to the generation of simulation, Baudrillard states:

This realization of a living satellite, *in vivo* in a quotidian space, corresponds to the satellitization of the real, or what I call the "hyperrealism of simulation": the elevation of the domestic universe to a spatial power, to a spatial metaphor, with the satellitization of the two-room-kitchen-and-bath put into orbit in the last lunar module. The very quotidian nature of the terrestrial habitat hypostasized in space means the end of metaphysics. The era of hyperreality now begins. What I mean is this: what was projected psychologically and mentally, what used to be lived out on earth as metaphor, as mental or metaphorical scene, is henceforth projected into reality, without any metaphor at all, into an absolute space which is also that of simulation ("The Ecstasy of Communication" 128).

Another concept in relation to 'the loss of the real' explained by Baudrillard is that sign disguises the fact that there is no reality underneath. He shows this concept through the example of painting within a painting. Here an artist is painting on a canvas through the window. What he paints is not reality, but merely another sign. Therefore, the sign that the artist is painting from

the window leads to another sign in which what is shown through the window is also a part of the painting and turns into another sign. He portrays the postmodern notion regarding the sign, which leads to another sign without leading to any hidden reality.

Postmodern thinkers point out the issues and problems of representation in the culture of the era. With the crusade of mass media and electronic technology, the very distinction between what is real and what is simulated is erased. On the one hand, the end of the grand narratives is noted, which are seen in all the previous eras including the modern era, and on the other hand, the problem of representation and loss of the real is found in postmodern texts and contexts. Both Baudrillard and Lyotard represent the spirit of postmodern culture. Additionally, the postmodern era is deeply grappled with the problems of language and it is pertinent to explore the different concepts of language. The poststructuralists who contradict and reject the preceding notions of language raise these problems with language.

We must note that poststructuralist notion of language has its roots in structuralism. Ferdinand De Saussure founded structuralism in his work *Course in General Linguistics*. For Saussure, a word or 'sign' links a concept (signified) with a sound or an image (signifier). Saussure generalizes three major concepts. Firstly, he emphasizes the arbitrariness in our process of assigning meanings to the words. Secondly, the meanings of words are relational and understood by the difference. That is to say, no word can be defined in isolation from other words. Thirdly, "language constitutes our world, it does not just record it or label it" (Barry 37). Structuralists are interested in the implication that if language as a sign system is based on arbitrariness of this kind, then it follows that language is not a reflection of the world and experiences, but a system, which stands quite separate from it. Structuralists posit that meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind, constructed by, and expressed through language: it is not

already contained within the thing. Post-structuralism is a later development of the structuralist views. Writers like Derrida and Foucault either modified or rejected the systems of structuralism.

One of the key figures in the development of post-structuralism in the late 1960s is Jacques Derrida. The starting point of post-structuralism may be taken from his 1966 lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. In this paper, Derrida suggests a particular intellectual 'event' that constitutes a radical break from past ways of thought, associating this break with the philosophy of Nietzsche, and Heidegger and the psychoanalysis of Freud. The event concerns the 'decentering' of our intellectual universe.

Derrida, a post-Nietzschean philosopher, also proclaims the demise of philosophy and the subsequent universality. He posits that the task of deconstruction is in fact to show that philosophical texts do not mean what they seem to mean, do not mean what their authors wanted them to mean, do not have any decidable meaning at all. The aim of a deconstructive reading of philosophical texts is to show how the claims of knowledge are full of internal tensions and contradictions or antimonies that end up by subverting their stated goals and their own claims to truth. It shows how every instance of presenting through linguistic models and philosophical attempts to suggest trans-historical, transcultural, trans-linguistic truths land into redundancy. Philosophers who aim at the truth cannot escape the gravitational forces of language. Philosophy's univocal concepts turn out to be nothing more than the disguised metaphors of strictly local prominence and significance. In other words, there is no escaping from the play of language.

Derrida in *Of Grammatology* redefines the contexts of both reading and interpretation. Derrida negates the conventional notions regarding reading and interpretation that they are meant to

reproduce the ideas and thoughts expressed by the authors. Peter Berry rightly indicates in this context:

This inadequate notion of interpretation Derrida calls a 'doubling commentary', since it tries to reconstruct a pre-existing, nontextual reality (of what the writer did or thought) to lay alongside the text. Instead, critical reading must produce the text, since there is nothing behind it for us to reconstruct. Thus, the reading has to be deconstructive rather than reconstructive in this sense. This is the point where Derrida makes the remark, which he later calls 'the axial proposition of this essay, that there is nothing outside the text' (69).

The job of the post-structuralist critic is to deconstruct the text. Unlike the conventional reading strategies, deconstructive reading unreels the hidden and inherent contradictions within the text. The process of deconstructive reading, as mentioned by Peter Berry, "is often referred to as 'reading against the grain' or 'reading the text against itself, with the purpose of knowing the text as it cannot know itself'" (70-71). The deconstructive reading focuses on unconscious patterns underlying in any word or statement.

In an attempt to carry out deconstructive reading, post-structuralism reverses the division of common binary oppositions like male and female, day and night, and light and dark, so that the other and subdued among the binaries is privileged and regarded as desirable. Instead of searching informality and coherent meanings in the text, it seeks contradictions and paradoxes. Identifying contradictory or paradoxical phrases is the first step in going against the grain of the poem, reading it 'against itself, showing the 'signifiers' at war with the 'signified', and revealing its repressed unconscious.

Derrida propounds the postmodern problem of reference generated through the 'play' in language. The postmodern 'play' in language stalls the final signified and offers either multiple signifieds or creates a void devoid of any signified. In any case, as postmodernists see it, any semiotic system can have the 'reference' problem, because the signifier is always 'slipping' toward another signified. It can be construed that the center or the final signified is both deconstructed and undermined. The simple concepts of language that typify it as a reliable source of knowledge are no longer relevant in the postmodern culture.

Peter Berry rightly posits, "The 'linguistic quirks' which seem relevant include several kinds of linguistic oddity or non sequitur of the kind which undermine secure meanings" (78). The term 'aporia', finally, is a popular one in deconstructive criticism. It literally means an impasse, and designates a kind of knot in the text, which cannot be unraveled or solved because of its self-contradictory nature. The aporia, resists disentanglement, and instead of generating meanings in the text, it excavates contradictions and paradoxes in it.

Derrida suggests that one does not have finality and unity of a center to determine interpretation and meaning. Interpretation and meaning transpire in multitudes from the equivocations and contextuality of signs within discourse. Discourse does not mean or reflect a world with fixity and determinism. It is full of 'playful' equivocation and contextuality of the sign; it becomes a synonym of madness, anxiety, and unintelligibility. There is no way in which one can fix meanings absolutely, or find completely stable structures to contextualize them in a deterministic manner. The 'play' does not mean an irresponsible skepticism or nihilism. Barry Stocker posits that, "play is the repetition, substitution and contextuality of the sign that can never be said to be simply absent or present, and the same applies to anything in the experienced world. The loss of an absolute origin is where Deconstruction arises" (186).

Along with the denial of stable meaning, center, and his rejection of Husserl's "Metaphysics of Presence", Derrida has given a key concept of 'différance'. Derrida's 'différance' does not simply mean as a kind of difference between things. The word 'différance' disrupts the metaphysical assumptions about transcendental and pure. For Derrida, there is no transcendental law, or pure idea, which exists in separation from the force and the empirical. This neologism is invented to characterize a unified phenomenon of two aspects of language, one synchronic, the other diachronic, which can be separately described as types of 'différance' in French. For the French, verb 'différer' means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. Thus, 'différance' means both difference and deferral.

The postmodernists see the root of many philosophical problems in the use of language. Derrida sees the root of much of philosophical binarism in the arbitrary division and prioritization of writing and speech. Historically, speech has been preferred over writing. According to logocentrist theory, speech is the original signifier of meaning, and the written word is derived from the spoken word. The written word is thus, a representation of the spoken word. It further asserts that language originates as a process of thought that produces speech, and that speech produces writing. Derrida counter argues with the established foundations about speech and writing and prefers writing to speech. According to him, writing is a better model for sign systems than spoken language. What Derrida terms 'writing' or 'trace' is not simply the letters, gestures of handwriting, or any kind of material vehicle. Derrida gives historical and ethical significance to writing. He does more than simply widening the meaning of signs and questions the conventional authority of spoken language.

Derrida argues that a signifier may be interior or exterior to other signifiers, according to their relation to the signified. Logocentrism asserts that speech has a quality of interiority and that

writing has a quality of exteriority. The play of difference between speech and writing is the play of difference between interiority and exteriority. Writing cannot be fully understood if it is viewed merely as an external representation of speech. Hence, logocentrism is inadequate if one wants to understand the full importance of writing. He presents different types of writings such as hieroglyphs, Chinese characters and the phonetic writing characteristics of European languages. He mainly uses the term 'writing' to emphasize the essential exteriority of genuine linguistic signs. Derrida now describes the position in "Speech and Phenomena" which invokes an inner voice of consciousness as 'phonocentrism'.

Derrida deconstructs 'closure' and eliminates all the possible distinctions. As it is known that structuralism operates with and within the circuit of closure. The same is the case with mathematical closure, which has been discussed by Husserl that it is necessary, though not sufficient condition, for rigor and consistency. On the other hand, Derrida contests the very possibility of closure. Consequently, tampering with closure generates an extreme sense of the fragility of distinctions. Derrida in his article 'Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences' presents a brief history of this totalizing or this closure. Neither exploring back to the origin, to the arche, nor forward to the end and telos can guarantee the whole or the unity. All the propositions of rigor or logical representations such as a closure (the possibility of sealing of the context of relevance, the possibility of constructing a series of verifiable steps in an argument), the relation between the center and the periphery, and the distinctions between important and unimportant or serious and frivolous are endangered.

Postmodernism is invariably associated with the terms such as discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentering, indeterminacy, and anti-totalization. It brims with contradictions and paradoxes, which follow the strategy of using and abusing, and installing and subverting. It

challenges the very concepts and notions that it includes in the beginning – be it architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or historiography.

Postmodern theorists show that the present postmodern phenomenon is a cultural product and an outcome of late capitalism, and its driving elements are bourgeois hegemony and the development of mass culture. It is culture specific; it grows out of a specific culture and evolves into new directions in other cultures of the world. Postmodern negation of the conventional binaries such as fact and fiction, day and night, and right and wrong, for instance, stimulates the development of magic realism first in Latin America and subsequently other cultures of the world. Different cultures adapt such narrative strategies from the perspective of their local needs. Magic realism, representational problems, and the play of irony and parody are adapted differently in Canadian culture as well as British culture. Canadian postmodernism bears the traces of postcolonial aspects that are absent in the other cultures. Just like Canadian culture, Indian culture, too, is fraught with the marks of colonialism. Rushdie writes Indian context in his postmodern/postcolonial books and foregrounds Indian culture in them. But applications and implications of the postmodern strategies are different in both Canadian literature and Indian literature. The postcolonial traces that are found in the books such as *Shame* or *Midnight's Children* are quite different from the postcolonial traces found in Canadian postmodern/postcolonial books. The colonial struggle and the ethnicity of the various cultures are different (White Vs. White colonial struggle in Canada and Australia, Brown Vs. White colonial struggle in India and Black Vs. White colonial struggle in West Indies).

The difference in the various cultures leads the strategies in different directions. The fragmentary and ironic life of the western culture is suggested in the works of Barth, Pynchon, and Doctorow.

Postmodern historiography in American fiction deconstructs both the unity of the form and narrates the fragmentary lives of the people. The rise of magic realism in the Latin America represents historical bias and injustice in Latin American culture. Magic realism becomes a natural tool of representation for the Latin American writers as the Latin American culture pervades with the liberating spirit in which the conventional boundaries such as magic and reality are absent naturally. The question of identity against the backdrop of colonialism in both India and Canada paves way for a different kind of magic realism and parodical inversions of the past. Spiritual crisis and meaninglessness become the subjects in 'historiographic metafiction' of the French postmodernism. Postmodern narrative strategies remain the same in different cultures, but they are adapted in terms of the local needs of various cultures. American, Italian, Indian, Japanese, and Canadian writers later adopt magic realism. Postmodern parodic inversions, popular in America, and England, are also adopted in Indian, African, and Canadian writings.

The relationship of postmodernism with culture is undeniable. The widespread impact of postmodernism is attributed to its cultural contextualization. The disillusionment of the global and universal truths and originality in the postmodern culture, already propounded by Lyotard and Derrida, inspires the writers to create subversive tools that both inscribe the literary and nonliterary elements and subvert them. Since there are no universal truths in the postmodern culture, the writers indulge into the postmodern play of subversiveness with its contextualization in local cultures across the world. The prevalence of uncertainty in cultures and philosophy inspire the writers to lead the campaign of interrogation, in which the postmodern spirit of questioning dismantles all the notions of absoluteness, be it history, God, or truths. This wave of interrogation emerges in the form of a cultural need as the world wars, the culture of

consumerism, and the development of mass media culture dethrone all the conventional supremacy of their absoluteness. For instance, in America, India, Latin America, and even Canada, the notion of unquestionable history is ironically inscribed and subverted in the postmodern texts. The notion of history is dethroned of its unquestionable supremacy and further, the distinction between the facts and the fiction is eroded. Postmodern writers such as Barth, Fowles, Doctorowe, Rushdie, and Marquez inscribe history in their texts and subvert its objectivity by diminishing the distinction between the fact and the fiction. They limit it to mere textuality.

The postmodern culture is rapidly reaching the point where there is no universe but rather universes. In the postmodern worldview pertaining to transience, flux, and fragmentation, the complicated and decentered sense of human beings and the world is presented. This is visible in the major works of postmodern writers. William Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* typifies all the issues. He satirically presents fragmentation, transience, and flux of the contemporary American society. The work has been written in nonlinear style, which aptly suits the subject matter.

Postmodern culture is plagued by the perverted sense of identity that is generated by consumerism. At the level of the individual, there abides a sense of uncertainty about how to understand oneself and attain the sense of identity. In postmodern times, the media-generated consumer culture daily offers us multiple choices for identity. This ultimately erodes the distinction between what is real and what is imagined, and produces the condition of hyperreality.

Postmodernism is, indeed, a cultural need that is explained by Barth in his essay *The Literature of Replenishment*. He emphasizes that the roots are found in the middle class popular culture. He

says, “I feel this is in particular for practitioners of the novel, a genre whose historical roots are famously and honorably in middle-class popular culture.” In support of this, he gives an example of Calvino’s *Cosminomics* in which the writer infuses fantastic events with the local and pertinent details of Italy. He further opines that pastiche, which means to combine, or “paste” together multiple elements, is an homage to, or a parody of, past styles. It can be seen as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society.

Postmodernism is rightly described by Hutcheon as “fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 4). This contradiction has emerged out of late capitalism. The sense of the past in postmodernism does not imply its nostalgic revisit, but it aims at critical revisiting of the past, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society. This critical reflection of postmodernism starkly differs from the nostalgic experiences of the modernists. This critical revisiting teeming with ironical connotations covers all the facets of arts and postmodern society. Because of its contradictory nature, it subverts the very system that it installs. Fragmentary aspects of postmodern culture and subsequent emergence of postmodern theories are utilized in the postmodern fiction. Postmodern fiction represents the fragmentary aspects of the prevailing culture and the theoretical enigmas of postmodern theories. The postmodern questioning and problematizing attitude, loss of unity, loss of the real and the problem of manipulative sign are represented in the fiction as well. Postmodern fiction not only questions universal truth and resists any singular meaning but also subverts the conventional unities of form demonstrated by the realist writers. The use of metafiction is a phenomenon or tendency that questions and subverts the conventional way of presenting reality. Reality cannot be presented in the fiction, since there cannot be objective or subjective reality that can be captured by a manipulative or unreliable sign. The problematic

nature of the sign coupled with the tendency of subverting the very form of the fiction take the fiction in a different direction. It is found that the cultural variations and the corresponding theoretical background of the era have been deployed in the fiction.

Postmodern writers explore metafictional elements heavily within the creation of fiction. Metafiction can be expressed not only through direct addressing a reader, but also through other means such as quotation, allusion, false quotation, paraphrasing, parody, pastiche, irony, and intertextuality. All these devices point out a certain connection between a literary text, a reader, other works of art, documents, historical records, and theories. One of the most important aspects of a postmodern literary work, closely connected to metafiction, is intertextuality. Broadly speaking, intertextuality is a term coined by a Bulgarian/French theorist Julia Kristeva, who expresses a connection between the texts through various devices and techniques. It is not a single mechanical connection, but rather a creative transformation of the referred texts in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

As far as fiction is concerned, Hutcheon puts it as historiographic metafiction, which is both intensely self-reflexive and yet inundated with historical events. It incorporates three major elements: theoretical self-awareness of history, fiction as human construct, and events of the past. It is neither historical novel nor it is the non-fictional novel. For example, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has been metafictionally self-reflexive and yet speaks about the real political and historical events.

Postmodernism distances itself from modernist objectivity, realist narrative patterns such as omniscient third-person narrators, fixed narrative points of view, and clear-cut moral positions. While celebrating modernist inheritance of fragmentation, it seeks to blur distinctions between

genres and reject conventional unity. This naturally leads to fragmentary forms that generate discontinuity and hybridity in postmodern creations. This hybridity or collage of innumerable sources becomes a chief weapon of postmodern writers to tell present their minimalist designs and this tendency leads to multiple plural and relativist visions of the world.

Critics like Hutcheon have rightly pointed out that postmodernism does not approve of humanistic traditions and dismantles the fundamentals and principles on which it has been founded. Modernists like Eliot and Joyce have been profoundly humanistic in their desire for stable aesthetic and moral values, even as the world did not have any universal system. Lyotard has rightly rejected all the metanarratives by considering them as incompatible with the postmodern world. Postmodernist writers prefer differences and contradictions and invite multiple truths and provisional systems instead of the traditional notion of one fixed system or universal truth in their works. One of the major challenges posed by postmodernism to humanism is the rejection and interrogation of consensus. Previously agreed upon common concepts, notion of consensus, unproblematic and public agreements are challenged in favor of differences, and the notion of consensus has turned into an illusion. Postmodernism also rejects the humanist separation of art and life does not hold any ground in postmodern works.

The political, social, and intellectual scenario forces the person to think that postmodernism is essentially based on interrogation of the existing fundamentals. It points out limits of language, subjectivity, sexual identity, systemization, and uniformity. These interrogative tendencies have contributed to what Lyotard has rightly called, “crisis in legitimation” in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Postmodern fiction, hence, questions all the previously established or universally accepted fundamentals. Just as Derrida points out the unreliable play of sign, novelists, too, present the play of sign and suggest the endless deferral of meaning. The

postmodernist writers such as Italo Calvino, Paul Auster, and Borges have presented such problems of language.

Conventional boundaries that were commonly accepted in the society are challenged. The postmodern culture and art transgresses these traditional boundaries in all the spheres of art as well as culture. In arts, it is visible that conventional boundaries and unities in various forms are consciously rejected. For example, in the arts, the unities of the genre do not hold any stand and on the contrary, there is a blending and transgressing of several genres. A novel is no longer simply a novel or a poem is no longer simply a poem. In the novel, it is found that other genres enter into it and create a kind of fusion of several other forms. Poems and drama show this postmodern phenomenon: poems become more and more prose-like and drama includes other genres in it. The borders between various genres have become fluid in such a way that a novel looks like a long poem, an autobiography, biography or history, and a poem looks like a replica of a prose form.

Paul Auster's *Invisible* can rightly figure at this point as the novel swings from biography to autobiography and letters, and it experiments with multiple points of view. The narrative complications are found in the first person narration, the second person narration, and the third person narration. An apparently simple story is complicated by these parodical experimentations. In an attempt to negate the realistic versions, the writer installs the omniscient point of view and its relationship with objectivity and undercut it simultaneously. It can be seen that postmodernism propounds crossing of all the conventional and fixed boundaries that were usually kept intact in the previous eras. What one finds is a kind of literature wherein the boundaries are crossed; the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, and art and life are eradicated. It is not simply with the fiction in which the life/art and other conventional

boundaries are crossed; other forms of arts such as painting and sculpture and the field of architecture also represent the same phenomenon. The extremist tendencies, meaninglessness, and the loss of truth permeate in the contemporary fiction. John Barth in his *The End of the Road* portrays characters who have lost hope of getting of meanings in life. Joe Morgon exemplifies this typicality. Postmodernism then, in stark contrast to modernism, is about the dissolving of the self. From the postmodernist perspective, one should not think of people as unique, unified, self-conscious, autonomous persons.

The final reality created by God no longer holds grounds in postmodern culture. Reality is not transparently presented by language, but rather controlled, distorted and subverted by language. Our perceptual identity and the reality of the world is only subjectively contrived by language. Against this backdrop, postmodern writers have adopted minimalist designs. They present the illusionary and representational language games. As Derrida puts, “there is nothing outside the text”, we are caught up in the text, in the endless game of logos or thought. Paul Auster presents this endless game in his works. In *The City of Glass*, the detective's pursuit of knowledge is frustrated. In an endless game of mirroring, Quinn demonstrates his inability to solve the mystery, just as the narrator fails to decipher words from Quinn's red notebook and to tell us further about the hero's destiny.

The fiction oozes with irony, metafiction, narrative techniques, and comic vision. Throughout *La Loma del Ángel* of Reinaldo Arenas, the playfulness of this postmodern text by its narrative tricks, irony, inventiveness, and metafictionality is recognized. It is rightly said that, “the fantastic scenes re-created by the author constitute the foundations of creativity within which resides the core of artistic impulse” (Manzari). More importantly, the fantastic scenes in the novel derive their power from the believable analogues of the reader's reality. Similar qualities

are found in *Slaughterhouse-Five* of Kurt Vonnegut, in which he presents irony and comic vision of the world. His comic vision is visible in the narrative pattern in which he compares war with Child's Crusade. He proves his comic vision as an appropriate one in many instances. At the same time, postmodern fictions dwell into the realm of black humor. Writers like John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, and Bruce Jay Friedman treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way.

Postmodernism construes that it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an independently existing reality. It rejects the whole notion of epistemology and denies the conventional notion regarding reason as a source of acquiring objective knowledge of the world. Instead, postmodernism ventures into socio-linguistic constructs in place of objective reality of the world.

Various postmodernist writers have practiced parodic intertextual relation between different genres. The postmodernists prefer discontinuity while inscribing continuity, difference while inscribing similarity, and disunity while inscribing unity. Hutcheon has rightly said in this regard, "parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some sense, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 11).

Parody is suggestive of the incorporation of past. It is regarded as textual tissues of various categories that belong to the past, ironic quotations, pastiche, and intertextuality. The basic aim behind parody is to bring past with it, but not in conventional terms of nostalgia that is found in earlier usages. Postmodern parody includes the past with critical insight that brings irony and a significant critical distance from the past. Secondly, it typifies the postmodern negation of the humanist tradition, which incorporates singleness, originality, and single or dominant authority. Parody propagates Lyotard's pluralism. Previously novels used to have an intact form that served

to fulfill the purpose of singleness or dominant authority. This pluralism, advocated in the postmodern era, replaces the single form or single authority with plural forms and multiplicity.

Notions of originality, authenticity, and presence are undermined in the postmodern novel. The subject is no longer considered or assumed as coherent or meaning generating entity. Multiple narrators in fiction deliberately invoke the sense of discontinuity, which limit their own omniscience by resisting easy interpretation and presenting multiple perspectives. Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate any attempt made in favor of unity and universalism. The center no longer holds its centrality, instead the ex-centric or marginal gains new significance and attains the new status in postmodern novel. Previously supported and endorsed stability in point of view has been subverted. The inheritance of modernist experiments develops into two major diversions in postmodern fictions: one takes the route of manipulative narrators and the other takes the route of being single narration but generating myriads of voices within. In both the cases, the inscription of subjectivity is problematized by the way of inscription and subversion. Rushdie's *Midnight Children* is about a single narrative strand evolving multiple stories and subjects pertaining to both the genders. This does not deny or reject subjectivity in any way, but it problematizes the entire notion of subjectivity. It challenges the traditional notion of its unity and its function. The totalizing power of narrative, of history, and of our notions of the subject is subverted. The novel overtly disturbs and disperses the notion of the individual, coherent subject, and its relation to history.

What is found in postmodernist fiction is a kind of questioning that extends itself to the extreme mode leaving nothing outside of its realm. The empirical basis of the humanist and positivist concepts of knowledge that is based on observation and experiments is called into question.

While referring to *The White Hotel*, Hutcheon mentions:

The White Hotel can be seen as a novel that overtly challenges both the realist novel's representation of the world of consistent subjects who offer an origin of meaning and action and also its presentation of a reader's position from which the text is easily understandable (since the reader too is thus reinforced as a coherent source of shared meaning). There is no closed, coherent, non-contradictory world or subjectivity either inside or outside the novel. The multiple points of view prevent any totalizing concept of the protagonist's subjectivity, and simultaneously prevent the reader from finding or taking any one subject position from which to make the novel coherent (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 169).

Postmodern novel on the one hand, asserts the principles whether conventional or unconventional and on the other hand, it deliberately undermines them. In other words, the principles have been operating in our society, but for many these principles are either passé or do not hold their ground in the current scenario. Postmodernism does not deny the existence of truth, but it certainly conditions this truth. It admits its own provisionality and is conscious of it. It contests and negates the idea of universal truths as the possibility of truths within the realm of language is termed as untenable by Derrida and Rorty. In this context, Peter Berry rightly suggests:

It has been said that there are three versions of every story, your version, my version, and the truth, but the case here is more complicated than that, since all the available terms are purely linguistic - there is no truth about these matters which exists securely outside language". (38)

Similar stance is taken against the truth-value of history. The view of history in the postmodern era has drastically changed. History is no longer simply a tool to know what happened in the past or a representation of reality of the past. It has taken a new route of redefining intellectual history by the means of studying the social meaning as historically constituted. It problematizes the concept of history as a realistic mode of representation. Postmodern fiction, further, questions the relations between history with reality and reality with language. Postmodernism confronts and contests the past overtly, which was previously discarded and ignored by the modernists. It suggests no search for the eternal truth, but rather it re-evaluates the past in the light of the present. It does not deny the existence of the past; it questions our possibility of knowing it and reduces its credibility to textuality.

Postmodernism, mentioned by Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, is a fundamentally contradictory movement that installs the conventions only to destabilize them later, uses and abuses the conventions in a parodic way, and it points out the inherent contradictions and paradoxes within it. The paradox of postmodern parody suggests that it is not essentially depthless or trivial kitsch, but rather a vision of interconnectedness.

Hutcheon contests the concept of “genuine historicity” of Jameson in which he considers postmodern art as social, historical, and existential present and the past as referent or ultimate objects. Hutcheon argues that postmodernism questions the very possibility of knowing the past or the ultimate objects. The reality of the past is nothing but the discursive one. The concept of genuine historicity becomes illusionary, which openly acknowledges its contingent and discursive identity. In other words, postmodernism does not deny the existence of the past, but questions its credibility. It can be seen that all the forms of postmodern art such as music,

literature, architecture, and painting foreground the historical, social, and ideological contexts in which they have existed and continue to exist.

In reaction against modernist ahistoricism resulted due to innovatory promises in the dehumanized and alienated society, a postmodern parodic revisitation of the past interrogates the modernist totalizing ideas of progress and rationality. Parody does not mean as something ridiculing with wit found commonly in the eighteenth century literature. The redefinition of parody is repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity. This parody enacts both cultural change and continuity in painting, historiographic metafiction, and architecture. Jameson's concept regarding parody is different in the sense that he considers parody as neutral or blank. According to Jameson, parody is replaced by pastiche that is a random combination of all styles of the past or the play of random stylistic allusion. The difference lies in Jameson's disregard for irony in parody. Jameson mentions:

The disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what maybe called pastiche. This concept, which we owe to Thomas Mann (in *Doktor Faustus*), who owed it in turn to Adorno's great work on the two paths of advanced musical experimentation (Schoenberg's innovative planification and Stravinsky's irrational eclecticism), is to be sharply distinguished from the more readily received idea of parody (16).

Postmodern parody uses historical memory and aesthetic introversion to signal that this self-reflexive discourse is inextricably bound to social contextualization. Parody becomes a natural choice of the postmodern writers as it maintains a critical and ironical distance with the past.

Parody has become a popular form for the ex-centric – black, ethnic, gay, and feminist artists – in their contest with the dominant heterosexual and male culture. It can be said that postmodernism tends to be historically aware, hybrid and inclusive. This historical/social curiosity and a provisional/paradoxical stance replace the prophetic/prescriptive posture of the great masters of modernism.

Postmodernism, as many critics point out, arises from the rethinking of modernism by the modernists themselves. While referring to architecture, Hutcheon posits:

Seeing the need for a new direction that would return architecture to the human and material resources of the social landscape, they (modernists) turned from pure form to function and to the *history* of function. But one never returns to the past without distance, and in postmodern architecture that distance has been signalled by irony (Poetics of Postmodernism 39).

Hutcheon recognizes the modernists' turn to the past, but the return to the history in postmodernism is not possible without the critical distance. This is only achieved by the ironical representation of the past in the work of art.

Irony is not what some critics argue as anti-serious. This shallow consideration would lead to ignoring its power of double voicing. Secondly, this game of irony in the historical representation is the only way to be serious in the postmodern era as there is no nostalgic innocence left in the era. A postmodern ironic rethinking of the past critically confronts the present. Postmodern fictions such as *Ragtime*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The White Hotel* narrate this postmodern perspective of subverting both reality and the conventionalities of the form.

Many critics and theorists have announced the death of the novel as it no longer attempts to portray reality. The new evolution of the novel transforms into surfiction or French New or New New Novel that represents self-reflexivity as a new mode of representation. It is also viewed as an extreme of modernist autotelic self-reflection in contemporary metafiction. Hutcheon describes the postmodern form of fiction as paradoxical, contradictory, and historically complex and calls it as “Historiographic Metafiction”.

Surfiction and the French New Novel are like abstract arts as they are quite obsessed with the form and experimentation or innovation in it. They do not transgress codes of representation and leave them alone. Whereas the postmodern novel, as suggested by Hutcheon, problematize narrative representation, even as it evokes it. Postmodern fiction is not only self-reflexively metafictional and parodic in nature but also invariably historical. She says in her book:

The fiction does not mirror reality nor does it reproduce reality. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 40).

She further posits that the questions of history and ironic intertextuality create an ‘enunciative’ or discursive situation in the fiction, which recontextualizes both the production and reception process. According to her, this leads a unique communicative process that includes historical, social, ideological, and aesthetic contexts and transgresses modernist self-reflexivity, which privileges the alienated perspective of the modernist writer (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 40). Unlike modernism, postmodernism is academic and popular, accessible and elitist. Books like

Ragtime or *Midnight's Children* are both academically used worldwide and at the same time, they have been best sellers. The difference between high and low arts disappears in postmodernism. One of the ways it achieves this quality is its attempt of installing the conventions of high and low art and then subverting them paradoxically.

Postmodern work of art or fiction is different from that of avant-garde, as it is not alienated from the culture. The postmodern fiction or art breathes and lives in the culture itself. It is neither only radical nor only adversarial. Unlike avant-garde, which attempts to alienate from culture and be critical of the dominant culture, postmodernism acknowledges its unavoidable implication in the dominant culture. At the same time, it both exploits and undermines that dominance. These contradictions are not really meant to be resolved but rather held in ironic tension. In other words, postmodernist discourse contests and dismantles the very myths and conventions it seeks to inscribe. The myths and conventions exist for a reason and postmodernism investigates and questions this reason. The aim of postmodernism is not to find an absolute vision but to question the very possibility of such a vision. Postmodernism denies or rejects either/or thinking as either/or thinking suggests resolution of the seemingly unresolvable contradictions. Either/or phenomenon points out at the choice based system and thereby accepting something and rejecting something. Postmodernism believes in both/and thinking. Postmodernism works on unresolvable binary thinking that provoke contradictions.

Hutcheon rightly argues that it is not easier to reject the modernist conventions as postmodernism is an extension, an intensification, a subversion, and a repudiation of modernism. Indeed, there are two ideological thoughts: one that suggests that postmodernism is an extension of certain modernist conventions and the other that suggests a complete ideological break. On the one hand, postmodern surface differs from the depth of modernism and on the other hand, ironic

and parodic tone of postmodernism contrasts with the serious tone of modernism. The difference is easily traced between modernist use of myth as a structuring device in the work of modernists such as Joyce, or Mann and the postmodern ironic contesting of myth as a master narrative in the novels of Barth, Reed, or Morrison.

Critics argue that the ironic distancing of the art and the audience in the modern times has been responsible for the intensification of postmodern "double distancing". The basic factor behind this contradictory relationship between modernism and postmodernism lies in the fact that postmodernism self-consciously incorporates the modernist conventions and with equal self-consciousness, it negates and questions the same modernist conventions.

Along with this 'double distancing'; pluralizing has become one of the main fundamentals of postmodernism. Sense of unity, uniqueness, closure, and authenticity has given way to an intertextual play, which infuses pluralism in the postmodern text. Postmodern novel questions the entire series of interconnected concepts that have been associated with liberal humanism: autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, and origin. The questioning does not mean to deny their existence, but only to interrogate their relation to experience. The process through which it carries out its mechanism is 'using and abusing' of the conventions. Life in postmodern environment has been more chaotic and fragmented, both mentally and spiritually.

Narrative continuity, in light of the contradictions, has been threatened in favor of discontinuity. It has been used and abused, or inscribed and subverted by the postmodern writers. The nineteenth century structures of narrative closure are undermined. Modern open endings have

been both used and abused by multiple endings or arbitrary closures endorsed by postmodern writers. Derrida has rightly argued that closure is not only not desirable, but also not even possible. Postmodern narrative does not seek to justify its autonomy, self-sufficiency, or transcendence, but rather it narrates its own contingency, insufficiency, and lack of transcendence. Postmodernism offers provisional alternatives to traditional and fixed unitary concepts. It cannot reject the technological advancement and international style, but it can subvert its uniformity, ahistoricity, and ideological and social aims.

The novel moves away from the center and with this movement, the novel shifts from the centers such as London, New York, and Toronto and narrates the stories of the periphery such as William Kennedy's Albany and Robert Kroetsch's Canadian West. The rejection of the center paves the way for the ex-centric. Postmodernism becomes a natural platform for the ex-centric such as black, feminist, native, ethnics, gays, and the third world cultures and becomes a vehicle to oppose and dismantle the monolithic movement of the dominant culture. This move from the center to the periphery leads to liberating spirit, which deconstructs the binaries and privileges the other. In this context, Hutcheon says that, "the modernist concept of single and alienated otherness is challenged by the postmodern questioning of binaries that conceal hierarchies (self/other)" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 61). She further expresses, "Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 61). Modernist exclusion of the other and the periphery is refuted by the postmodern celebration of the inclusion.

The multiple, the heterogeneous, and the different reject both the abstract category of single otherness created by coercive separation and unequal privileges. The language of margins and borders marks a position of paradox. Given this position, it is not surprising that the postmodern

form with its heterogeneity and difference assume the quality of parody and Intertextuality. This quality of double voicing becomes a weapon for the ex-centric, the other, and the margins. Hutcheon asserts that this, “parodic double-voicing or heterogeneity is not just a device which allows contesting assertions of difference. It also paradoxically offers a textual model of collectivity and community of discourses which has proved useful to both feminism and postmodernism” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 67).

The enunciative subject that refers to the discursive activity, which was previously denied by objectivity and linguistic transparency. It is now surfacing in postmodernism with its inscribing and subverting of the notions of objectivity and linguistic transparency. The repressed and denied discursive practices have been practiced in postmodern art. Hutcheon articulates in this context:

Unless we are willing to allow the self-reflective quality of both contemporary art and theory to lead us to what may indeed turn out to be those very paradoxes or moments of internal contradiction that mark both change and a provisional kind of (discontinuous) continuity in the emergence of a repressed practice into the position of a new theoretical mode.” And she further says that postmodern art “must be situated, first, within the enunciative act itself, and second, within the broader historical, social, and political (as well as intertextual) context implied by that act and in which both theory and practice take root” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 75).

This enunciative practice is enriched in the postmodern text wherein the preference is given to the reader in the process and reception of a work. Barth rejects the idea of originators and considers the writer as ‘textual Scriptor’. The postmodern thought propounds the idea that it is the act of reading, which decides the meaning and not the authorial intentions. The postmodern

text is read within the contexts of the reader. Texts are multiple writings drawn from multiple cultures and the reader is the activator of this contextual understanding.

In emphasizing the receiver's role, postmodern works do not suppress the process of production. The concept of the artist as unique and originating source of final and authoritative meaning may well be dead, as Barthes claimed. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that this position of discursive authority still lives on, because it is encoded into the enunciative act itself. This paradox has itself become the focus of much postmodern art and theory. What turns out, as a result, is a general dethroning of suspect authority, centered and totalized thought, and a renewed aesthetic and theoretical interest in the interactive powers involved in the production and reception of texts is witnessed. The narrator is always aware of his enunciative act in relation to both reader and context. Typical of postmodern fiction the full context in which the enunciation operates is both intertextual and social. The same kind of self-consciousness about the social and textual contexts is also found in postmodern theories. Derrida's constant awareness of the contextual status of his own discourse suggests self-consciousness in the theoretical discourses.

The idea of text in this sense stresses process, context, and enunciative situation, which are important to postmodern discourses, both theoretically and practically. The status of the author in the act of enunciation is no longer considered as the central. The status of a producer is something to be filled up as a part of a text just as a reader. By doing this, postmodernism subverts the ideology of originality of an author. In other words, the position of the producer of the text is rethought. Hutcheon in her book rightly suggests, "However, as I have been suggesting, the producer of the text (at least from the reader's point of view) is never, strictly speaking, a real or even an *implied* one, but is rather one *inferred* by the reader from her/his positioning as enunciating entity". (Poetics of Postmodernism 81). Postmodern fiction studies the

relation between the producer and the receiver, and it takes into consideration the entire aspect of enunciation or the discursive process. In other words, the transformation of a suppressed discursive practice (the entirety of the enunciation) into one of the very tools of theoretical analysis is noticed. This involves a rethinking of the relation of receiver to both text and inferred producer.

It is seen that the nature of enunciation involves discursive practices with historical, political, and social contexts in the production and reception of the text. While incorporating history, the postmodern text takes into account the process of writing, the social aspects, consideration of the reader's role, and the discursive practices. Rejecting the modernists' decontextualization of history, postmodern texts of the writers such as Salman Rushdie, Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Doctorow, and the others incorporate historical contextualization in their notable works. Part of this problematizing return to history is no doubt a response to the hermetic ahistoric formalism and aestheticism that characterized much of the art and the theory of the so-called modernist period.

Doctorow's *Ragtime*, for example, shows the historical context through the fragmentary narration of the past and simultaneously challenges the traditional realist narrative conventions of the inscription of the subject as coherent and continuous. It shows the meeting of the fictional characters with the real historical characters and problematizes the relationship between what is real and what is fictional through this fictional meeting between them.

What postmodern writings in history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are merely discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which one makes sense of the past. The meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems, which make those past

events into present historical facts. “This is not a “dishonest refuge from truth” but an acknowledgement of the meaning making function of human constructs” (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism 89).

The new literary history does not attempt to preserve history, but it bears a problematic and a questioning relationship with history. The new historicism returns to the historical embeddedness of literary production. In postmodern fictions (*Midnight's Children*, *The White Hotel*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*), there is a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational discursive elements, thereby challenging the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation. The focus of postmodern rethinking of the problems relies on how to have access to knowledge of the past. The postmodern historical sense situates itself in this context. The postmodern notion of history is not compatible with the Enlightenment progress or development, idealist/ Hegelian world-historical process, or essentialized Marxist notions of history.

Postmodernism returns to confront the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for us in the present. It does not deny the existence of the past, but it simply puts the past into question in terms of its accessibility to us. Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that history has a truth claim by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, and signifying systems. Both history and fiction unavoidably construct the past in the process of textualization. The past once existed is only accessible to us in textualized form: documents, eyewitness accounts, and archives. The reservoir of available materials is always acknowledged as a textualized one. In the

process of historiographic metafiction, postmodern fiction problematizes the public and historical, and the private and biographical.

In the matter of history and fiction, Hutcheon has rightly pointed out the question of historical knowledge while introducing the term ‘Historiographic Metafiction’. She argues, “Historiographic metafiction, for example, keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 106). She further adds, “Historiographic metafiction, in deliberate contrast to what I would call such late modernist radical metafiction, attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 106).

There have been increasing questions regarding the records of history. The modernist formalism always favored eradication of history from the literary text. In the evocation of history in postmodernism, the writers in terms of its completeness and concreteness pose serious questions. *Cassandra*, for example, a novel by Christa Wolf, retells Homer’s historical epic of men and their politics and wars from the point of view of the untold story of women and their everyday life. History tellers in the past have always silenced the marginalized voices such as women and the other. Coetzee offers a female version of narrative in his parody of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, which is originally presented from the point of view of the male character. Coetzee presents the story from the point of view of a “silenced” woman, Susan Barton.

Historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative

positioning. Those past events are known through their discursive inscription, through their traces in the present. Hutcheon asserts in this regard that:

Historiography, according to Derrida, is always teleological: it imposes a meaning on the past and does so by postulating an end (and/or origin). So too does fiction. The difference in postmodern fiction is in its challenging self-consciousness of that imposition that renders it provisional (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 97).

Foucault's work has joined that of Marxists and feminists in insisting on the pressure of the historical contexts that have usually been ignored in formalistic literary studies. To speak of discursive practices endorsed by Foucault is not to reduce everything to a global essentialized textuality, but to reassert the specific and the plural, the particular, and the dispersed. Foucault's assault on all the centralizing forces of unity and continuity in theory and practice challenges all forms of totalizing thought. Historiographic metafiction shares the Foucauldian urge to unmask the continuities that are taken for granted in the western narrative tradition, and it does so by first using and then abusing those very continuities.

The conventional separation of the literary and the historical is now challenged in postmodern theory and art. Recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality.

Historiographic metafiction is obsessed with the problematization of fact and fiction and questions both facts and fictions from the historical point of view. What used to be considered as false or falsities in the eighteenth century are termed as multiple truths or relative truths. For example, Christina Wolf's *No Place on Earth* is about the fictionalized meeting of two historical figures, dramatist Heinrich von Kleist and poet Karoline von Günderrode. The "we" of the narrating voice, in the present novel, underlines the metafictional historical reconstruction on the level of form. On the thematic level too, life and art meet, and this is the theme of the novel, as Wolf's Kleist tries to break down the walls between fantasies and the actualities of the world. Milan Kundera in his novel *Immortality* presents many fictionalized incidents related to Goethe. For example, in one of the chapters he presents a fictionalized conversation between Goethe and Hemingway. Historical characters are also found in the novels of Doctorow. *Ragtime* has many historical characters such as Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit, Harry K Thaw, Stanford White and a few others who have been incorporated in the fiction. These real characters are assigned significant duties in the novel. Their roles resemble their real life and real incidents, and those real incidents are presented through the subjective narrative style, which cannot be held as authentic. In addition to this, these real characters are shown in an unusual and controversial association with the fictional characters. For example, Evelyn Nesbit's association with Tateh, The Little Girl, and the Younger Brother is purely fictional and debatable.

Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and false may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction. Postmodern novels like Pynchon's *V*, Milan Kundera's *Immortality*, and Rushdie's *Shame* clearly assert multiple truths. Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses the boundaries between them. Postmodern novel seeks to represent and rewrite the past to open it up

to the present and to prevent it from being conclusive or teleological. Postmodern novels present this double layer of historical reconstruction metafictionally. Further, the problematizing of the nature of historical knowledge in postmodern novels points both to the need to separate and to the danger of separating fiction and history as narrative genres. This problematizing has also been in the foreground of much contemporary literary theory and philosophy of history.

History and novels are different, though they share social, cultural, and ideological contexts, as well as formal techniques. Novels except some extreme surfictions incorporate social and political history to some extent; historiography, in turn, is as structured, coherent, and teleological as any narrative fiction. Both history and fiction are cultural sign systems and ideological constructions whose ideology include their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained. Historical fiction is modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by the notion of history as a shaping force. Apart from focusing on the ex-centric and the marginalized, historiographic metafiction espouses a postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference.

Historiographic metafiction plays upon the truth and the falseness of the historical record. In novels like *Foe*, *Burning Water*, or *Famous Last Words*, certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible hint of the failures of the correct record of history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error. The second difference lies in the way in which postmodern fiction actually uses the historical data. Historiographic metafiction acknowledges the reality of the past, but also mentions that one can only access the reality of the past through the existing textuality. In many historical novels, the real figures of the past are deployed to validate or authenticate the fictional world by their presence and to remove or hide the distinction between history and the novel.

Postmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction between historiography and fiction, issues surrounding the nature of identity and subjectivity, the question of reference and representation, the intertextual nature of the past, and the ideological implications of writing about history. Historiographic metafiction appears to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity, for instance, multiple points of view as shown in Auster's *Invisible* or an overtly controlling narrator as shown in Swift's *Waterland*. In the novels, one does not find a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty. This is not a transcending of history, but a problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history. Postmodern fictions highlight our inability to assess the past in its totality and questions all the epistemological claims pertaining to recording the past. Hutcheon rightly posits in this context, "historiographic metafiction often points to this fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography (especially footnotes) to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations" (Poetics of Postmodernism 123).

There is a return to the act of embedding both literary and historical texts in fiction, but the very act has been complicated or problematized by overt metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs. The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts, in a way, the views of certain contemporary historiographers: it offers a sense of the presence of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces - be they literary or historical.

In postmodern fiction, "what is both instated and then subverted is the notion of the work of art as a closed, self-sufficient, autonomous object deriving its unity from the formal interrelations of its parts. Postmodernism both asserts and then undercuts this view, in its characteristic attempt to retain aesthetic autonomy while still returning the text to the "world" (Poetics of Postmodernism

125). The world does not suggest the common reality of the world, but the world of texts and intertexts. This world has direct links to the world of empirical reality, but it does not possess the authenticity pertaining to empirical reality. It is a contemporary critical truism that posits realism as a set of conventions, that representation of the real is not the same as the real itself. Historiographic metafiction challenges both naive realist concept of representation and naive textualist or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world.

To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. Postmodern parody not only enables the reader to recognize the textual traces of the past, but also it enables the reader to be aware of those traces through irony. The reader is forced to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also the value and the limitation of the inescapably discursive form of that knowledge. The parodic representation can be found in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* in which Calvino parodically represents the past. The case of Marco Polo, as shown by Calvino, proves the point of historical complexities through the play of subjective narrative style and unverifiable available textual sources. Certainly, Calvino parodically takes his frame-tale, his travel plot, and his characterization from *IL Milione*. Many postmodern novelists and critics such as Umberto Eco and Barthes have said that intertextuality is an inevitable task wherein stories must tell the stories already told by different writers, and books must tell about the other books.

In support of this, there are many postmodern writers who have taken a periodic stance in their writings. Postmodern fiction uses parody to restore history and memory and to question the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, for example parodies several historical texts as well as literary

texts. A clear reference of Harry Houdini and stories of his life are found in it. The focus of *Ragtime* is America of 1902: the time of Teddy Roosevelt's presidency, Winslow Homer's painting, Houdini's fame, J. P. Morgan's money, and news of cubism in Paris. The writer narrates not only the interests of history, but also those of literature. For instance, literary texts such as Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas* and Dos Passos's *U.S.A. Trilogy* have been used in a parodic way apart from many other historical references. Doctorow does not follow his predecessors and rejects the idea of objective presentation of history. Postmodern writers argue that past is assessable through the textual form and these textual forms interact with each other in a complex way. This does not deny the value of writing history; it merely redefines the conditions of value. Historiographic metafiction, therefore, challenges the conventional forms of fiction and history writing through their acknowledgement of their inescapable textuality.

What postmodern fiction attempts to do is to locate self-consciously itself between past event and present praxis. It is already said that the past is real and it existed, but today it can only be found or known as something lost, and no longer within our reach except through the remnants available in the form of texts or language. Hutcheon rightly states that:

Postmodernist reference, the problematic area in fiction that suggests the fallacious nature in postmodern referential system which includes historical as well as linguistic references and their co-relations, differs from modernist reference in its overt acknowledgement of the existence of the past real (except through discourse) (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 146).

It is strikingly different from the realist reference in its explicit assertion of that relative inaccessibility of any reality that might exist objectively and prior to our knowledge of it. Here fiction points out the problematic nature of language and the inaccurate system of historical

knowledge. Postmodern historiographic metafiction attempts to accept the reality of the past and points out a teasing nature of that reality that it is accessible through the available discourses and it just questions how we know about that reality. The problem of reference is complicated in historiographic metafiction as it presents a somewhat overtly fictive world and complicates it with the addition of the historical traces.

The problem of reference is further complicated by the adaptation of post-structuralist views of language in fictions. Derrida's denial of the external reference that there is nothing outside the text does not imply that there is no meaning outside the text. He meant to question the accessibility of the external meaning to us in terms of signification. He said that meaning could only be derived within the text through deferral or *différance*. This post-structuralist thinking is adapted in the historiographic metafiction in which it questions the nature of the archive, document, or evidence. In this context, Hutcheon posits that, "What historiographic metafiction does is reinstate the signified through its metafictional self-reflexivity about the function and process of meaning-generation while at the same time not letting the referent disappear" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 149). The fiction focuses on the complicated relationship between language and reality. Coetzee's *Foe* discusses the same point. Through Crusoe's tongueless Friday he presents this linguistic dilemma of language and representation of reality. His inability to speak anything represents a problem of language and reference. The novel also discusses about the nature and function of linguistic reference and manages to problematize even further the entire novel's relation to fictive, intertextual, and political reality. At times, the postmodern writers play with the idea of reality and confuse the term with the other forms of realities. Burroughs mingles fiction, fantasy, dreams, and hallucinations and plays with their subtleties by dislodging the differences between them. In Burroughs' novel *Naked Lunch*, it is difficult to distinguish

between realities, dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations of a drug addict. In this novel, drug addicts' fantasies stand as a metaphor for the general human condition in the postmodern period, which is understood not as clear, identifiable as in a realistic novel, or as subjectively perceived and reflected in the human mind, but as chaotic, entropic, paranoiac and difficult not only to comprehend but also to respond to.

As far as the study of postmodernism is concerned, one cannot ignore the feminist contributions in the arena of postmodernism. The relationship of feminism and postmodernism is quite complex. Postmodern concepts such as anti-humanism, anti-realism, anti-authoritarianism, and anti-representationalism have values for and against feminism. Feminist writers who struggle to be established as authors in the literary field get worse treatment from Barthes and Foucault. Their notions of the death of the subject and the death of the author destabilize traditional concepts of authors and consequently, repudiating the conventional stance of the authors. Michael Greaney posits:

News of the death of the author, for example, seems to come at exactly the wrong time for those who bid to rescue female authors from the neglect they have suffered beyond the pale of a male-dominated canon: there is no advantage in having a room of one's own if there is no author to occupy it" (99).

Michael Greaney also mentions the counter argument that the repudiation of the author could also enable the feminists to do away with the sole male figure of authorship as the death of the author clearly removes the single authorship. Sara Ahmed rightly takes into account the notion of the death of the author and says, "The loss of a specific body, a specific figure which is writing and written into the body of writing, suggests that, within the context of Barthes's piece, writing is written by no-body, no-body who is identifiable either as subject or body" (123).

The feminists waver in between modernism and postmodernism. It is known that postmodernism deconstructs or sometimes repudiates the concepts of epistemology or ontology. Considering this fact, some critics find their place only in modernist notions. Regina Gagnier, for example, grounds feminism in the epistemological foundations. For feminism, the prevalent reality of sacrifice, tyranny, and oppression is something that they like to contest or oppose. These realist epistemological notions are the basis for feminist critics and hence, postmodern rejection of this humanism or epistemological notions would destroy the very notions of feminism. Postmodernism offers dual stand to the feminist writers.

The postmodern decentering of the entire authoritarian notions can help feminist criticism as postmodernism decenters all dominations, the theory of one truth, and the other male dominated metanarratives. This decentering criterion incorporates hitherto neglected ex-centric or margins. What one can say concerning this point is that postmodernism accepts multiple, provisional, and local truths and gives voice to them. The male centered truths or patriarchy is consequently rejected by the postmodern acceptance of the multiplicity and provisionality of the truths. The oppressions under the disguise of universality or universal truth cannot be tolerated under the roof of postmodernism. Sara Ahmed mentions in this regards, “To this extent, *The Postmodern Condition* provides an important account of why consensus should not become a proper object of ethical dialogue” (49).

The point that Sara Ahmed raises is that the feminist differences are to be equally accepted and celebrated in a male dominated society. It is also argued that Lyotard’s arguments have been reconciled in feminist criticism. For example, self-legitimizing metanarratives that present the universal story of man must be negated in favor of the other or the differences. Carol Gilligan in her works shows the oppressive nature of universal theories and mentions that the idea of a

universal moral theory neglects the process of gender differentiation and, consequently, the located and embodied nature of subjectivity. Many feminist critics have asserted that generalizations and abstractions normally exclude the differences.

Postmodern rejection of metanarratives provides an apt platform for the feminist criticism to flourish and propagate feminist points of view. However, as said earlier, postmodernism creates a dual impact on feminism. On the one hand, it might just prove to be a catalyst for the development of feminism; on the other hand, it subverts the very foundations of feminism. The embodiment of the postmodern concepts and philosophical standpoints are identified in the fictions of feminist writers. Angela Carter in her novel *Nights at the Circus* expresses theoretical self-consciousness. The talk of signs, signifiers, simulacra, deconstruction, difference, panopticism, symbolic exchange, and false consciousness are clearly found in the novel. The novel's complex variations on the themes of inscription, textuality, and the supplementary relations between speech and writing induce the reader to speculate the influence of the writings of Jacques Derrida. The novel further resists the notion of nostalgia of old humanism and presents the play of surfaces. The novel continually challenges its own intellectual positions and undermines its own truths.

The subject matters include male-female relationship that is characterized by cycles of cruelty, exploitation, and retaliation. It obsessively presents the issue of liberation in which emancipation and prisonlike situations are juxtaposed, and the characters deal constantly with these two opposites. Carter introduces a female Panopticon, wherein women who have been found guilty of killing their husbands are kept. This section of Carter's novel is obviously modelled on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* that explores Jeremy Bentham's design for the perfect prison with a central tower encircled by a ring of backlit cells, whose solitary inmates are constantly

visible. For Foucault the major effect of the Panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.

The other feminist writer Kathy Acker incorporates postmodernist strategies in her works. Acker builds her novels out of pastiche technique through which she builds her novels out of scraps from various literary and popular traditions. Her novels try to repudiate the homogeneity of culture, exposing the numerous and varied discourses that at any moment influence and shape the minds of people. Her novels narrate contradictions in the discourses just as the other postmodern novels do. Along with the utilization of the postmodern techniques, Acker's novels are obsessed with investigating the history of representation, particularly the representation of women. Acker in her works represents various approaches and theories presented by major postmodernists. Nicola Pitchford in her book writes:

Acker herself, in interviews and in her work, appears also to endorse such an approach through her discussion not only of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, but also the more overtly psychoanalytical theorists, Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guat-tari, and indeed, Jacques Lacan" (67).

It is found that the postmodern feminist writers utilize and adapt postmodern theories for the feminist cause.

When one thinks about postmodern fiction, one considers intertextuality as one of the key elements of the fiction. Angela Carter's writing has been marked by this intertextuality; her novels are filled with the traces of innumerable other texts. She draws from innumerable sources of history. Rebecca Munford in her article mentions the issue of intertextuality, "From fairy tale to French decadence, from medieval literature to Victoriana, and from cookery books to high

theory, Carter's narratives are littered with allusions and references drawn from a wide range of cultural spheres" (1). Carter's uninhibited use of citations or intertextuality dismantles the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms and unsettles the workings of power, legitimacy and the sacred. Her novels express the challenge to mimetic assumptions about representation by promoting narrative uncertainty, heterogeneity, and dispersal. In her presentations, it is found that she continuously contests and denounces, through intertextual citations, western patriarchy, and challenges the stability and the authority of male-authored canonical representations. Carter's textual process draws inspiration from Barthes' seminal essay "The Death of the Author" challenging the ideology of authorial originality and consciousness and refusing the authority through intertextuality. Barthes says in his essay:

The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth, of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them (146).

After having seen the different tendencies of the postmodern fiction, it is pertinent to explore how different postmodern writers utilize them in their respective cultures. As mentioned earlier, it is true that postmodern tendencies are culture specific and hence, writers from different cultures utilize them in different perspective. The use of postmodern tendencies in France by the writers such as Kundera is far different from the use of postmodern tendencies by the Italian writer Italo Calvino. It is necessary to consider the different usages of postmodern tendencies in various cultures.

Borge's utilization of postmodern tendencies has been a source of inspiration for many postmodern writers. One of the aspects of Borge's writing is to ensure that the reader becomes critically aware of his or her own process of reading. This is one of the characteristic effects of metafiction. This actually in turn stops the reader to consume the fiction passively in the way classical realist works tend to do. Borge's fiction not only makes the reader active, but also invites the reader in the process of generating meaning out of the text.

One of his famous works 'The Garden of Forking Paths' (1941) is presented as a First World War spy story in order to explore further fiction's capacity to create imagined worlds. The academic protagonist of this story, Yu Tsun, a Chinese former English professor, is trying to pass information about a planned British offensive to his German paymasters, and is being pursued by his adversary, Captain Richard Madden. Tsun finds his way to the house of a British spy Dr. Stephen Albert, who informs him that the house formerly belonged to Tsun's great grandfather Ts'ui Pen, an esteemed and learned man who spends the last thirteen years of his life in solitude writing an 'inexhaustible' and 'infinite' novel entitled *The Garden of Forking Paths*.

This story is representative of one of the characteristic effects of postmodern storytelling. Instead of presenting one universe, Borge employs many parallel universes. This is also called Multiverse, a term that emerges in 1960s British science fiction. It suggests that the space of all fiction, not just the postmodern variety, is 'virtual reality', and it has been operational long before computer technology, and it produced its more limited version. Postmodern fiction merely emphasizes this special capacity rather than choosing to adhere to the ideology of realism.

The writings of Italo Calvino are known for postmodernist techniques. The versatility demonstrated by Calvino can be seen in his comparably broad frame of historical and theoretical reference. The works repeatedly take us to the Classics, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and

the Enlightenment, while also engaging with recent and ongoing critical debates spawned by formalism, structuralism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and semiology. Calvino's works show the working of an extraordinarily versatile mind, keen on experimenting with a variety of fictional and nonfictional forms. His works narrate the qualities of postmodernist fiction, science fiction, folkloric tradition, and magic realism. Dani Cavallaro in his study of the works of Italo Calvino expresses the central aspects of the works of Calvino. He points out:

The main factors lending coherence to Calvino's work are his consistent interweaving of realism and fantasy and his equally assiduous return to certain themes: identity, space, time, perception and, above all, the roles played by language and storytelling as means of giving shape to human experience (5).

He further adds:

Calvino's vision is able to capture in one single inspired movement the sophisticated aesthetics of the most accomplished avant-garde trends and the purity of an atavistic poetic imagination, the exploratory acumen of the boldest post-Einsteinian physicist and the colorful intuitiveness of medieval troubadours (5).

Calvino rejects the traditional notions regarding reality. Exploring or searching reality means confronting its invisible aspects and phantoms. He takes the readers into new extremes of reality devoid of the boundaries of time and space. The characters in his fictions oscillate between past, present, and future and at the same time wonder into the boundless realm of imagined possibilities.

Calvino's imaginative or magical worlds of fictions do not represent the utopian world or mathematical calculations in relations to the future or the past, but it typifies the present intellectual condition of the world. Dani Cavallaro rightly says:

Calvino is not concerned either with the projection of utopian domains onto the future or with the application of precise mathematical principles to imaginary, alternative worlds but rather with unleashing a virtually inexhaustible progeny of hypothetical universes which, however primordial they may seem, actually resonate with contemporary intellectual preoccupations (43).

Milan Kundera's novels present postmodern techniques in a subtle and indirect way. His novels ooze with irony, subtle metafiction, intertextuality, and blending of fictional and real personages of history. In *Laughable Loves*, irony is shown as a main tool to represent life in the postmodern era. Kundera interrogates his characters, poses questions to various narrators, and engages his readers in the process of writing. Kundera is an author who uses a variety of structural ways to question the conventional narrative patterns. In *The Joke*, he uses the technique of multiple narrations. By cross-examining the accounts of the story furnished by four narrators, Kundera exposed their overlapping delusions. A related technique employed by Kundera is multiple points of view on the author's part, resulting in shifts of perspective and of the relative scale of importance. Terry Eagleton rightly describes the techniques of Kundera. She posits:

Kundera constantly interrupts himself in order to give the slip to the totalitarian drive of literary fiction, breaking off the narrative to deliver his latest ontological musings, inserting a sheaf of brief philosophical reflections between episodes, airily abandoning the fictional pretense in the interests of historical documentation. All of this is done

casually, apparently spontaneously, without modernist outrage or obtrusiveness, utterly bereft of any intense aesthetic self-consciousness or portentous experimentalism (49).

Kundera's works self-consciously put an effort towards elaborate linguistic play, an acknowledgment on the level of content and presentation that language is itself indeterminate. "Room for plural interpretation and erotic bliss is cleared away in the unpredictable space between the shifting allegiances of signifier and signified" (O'Brien). The problems of reference and the arbitrariness of the signs are typified in his fictions. The most obvious display of this postmodern notion is found in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In this work, Kundera expresses the linguistic problems in the relationship between Franz and Sabina.

William Burroughs is one of the noticeable American writers of postmodernism. From his first publications, the most distinctive feature of Burroughs's fiction is its combination of different kinds of texts. He is known for the technique of intertextuality, through which he combines texts such as autobiographies, fictional narrative and texts by other writers.

His *Naked Lunch* is a first-person narrative by a junkie who narrates his aberrant, weird, and experiences in the postmodern decentered culture. The novel does not have chapters in the conventional linear sense, one leading to the other, but are organized into various sections with titles such as 'Interzone' and 'The Examination'. The disorienting plot does not allow the reader to comprehend the logic of the text. In fact, he negates the idea of portraying a single and direct theme in the fiction; instead, the author creates multiple themes confusingly interconnected with each other. Burroughs questions the realist idea of linear and faithful narration of the external reality.

Nicol mentions the observations of Brion Gysin, Burroughs's friend and an artist. He states in his book:

Gysin noted that the shape of the rat-gnawed typescript of *The Naked Lunch* was determined by the random order in which its sections happened to fall into place as the final draft went to the printer. For subsequent works, Burroughs sought a more radical way of injecting such randomness into the process of composition – and thus opening up its potential meanings and the number of situations we 'experience' as we read it (66).

This technique is called as the 'cut-up' technique. This is related to 'fold-in' technique, wherein a page of text is folded down the middle, placed on another page, and the composite text is then read across half one text and half the other, and it makes the reading of fiction as multi-dimensional and sensual experience like listening to music, watching films or looking at a collage of images. Bran Nicol discusses about this technique in his book:

Perhaps the most significant implication of the cut-up/fold-in process is that essentially it is not about writing but reading – perhaps even a new way of experiencing the world. Burroughs claimed, with justification, that the 'cut-up' technique was actually a form of realism especially suited to reflecting the nature of modern reality than any kind of 'representational' art (70).

Burroughs's works prove influential on postmodern authors who want to challenge conventional realist approaches of composing fiction and associated values such as originality.

Thomas Pynchon and Paul Auster are considered prominent postmodern American writers today. In their fiction, they attack Enlightenment reason and the convention of the modern novel, which is a totalized, rationalized subsystem of the Enlightenment world. Pynchon problematizes the

process of narration by questioning the false assumption of stable signified in his *V.* The novel deals with multiple narratives within the single story: one narrative by Profane and the other narrative by Stencil. Pynchon plays with the universality of reason and the conventions of the traditional novel by abandoning the logic of cause and effect. The novel resists the desire for continuity and totality. For example, the reader's encounter with Victoria Wren in Cairo in 1998 is not presented with logical justifications and the writer deliberately leaves the loopholes to break the chain of cause-effect narration. Even the relationship between the two narratives is not established casually in the novel. Abandoning the logic of cause and effect eschews origin, problematizes the narrative, and opens up the text to infinite readings and interpretations. Displaying of multiple subjectivities in the novel, Pynchon shows the narrator (Stencil) as himself, presenting his stories in third person and complicating the narrative. Thereby, the notion of authoritative vantage point is undermined. Multiple identities create openness in subjectivity and undermine the notion of totality. The novel suggests the postmodern thought that representation is contingent and subjective, and truth is provisional or contingent.

V.'s style and structural technique reinforce this multiple and pluralistic approach to meaning as a way to avoid the closed system. The language gives multiple perspectives without privileging one particular perspective. It deliberately creates worlds that are mysterious and inexplicable to force the reader to question his ability to know and explain. The events and situations in the novel force the reader to think that there is no single truth or no single historical point of view but only multiple truths and series of versions. The detective quest for *V.* by Stencil is a parodic one and the impossibility of knowing who *V.* is shows symbolically the human inability of knowing any truth. It does seem that *V.* is everywhere as there are traces that *V.* might be Vheissu, Venus, Queen Victoria, the Holy Virgin, velocity, Valletta and a sewer rat named

Veronica. In other words, V. is everywhere and yet V. is nowhere. The novel ends with not a clear-cut resolution of the chaos/order binary, but with a symbol of indeterminacy and mystery.

The New York Trilogy written by Paul Auster also belongs to the tradition of metafictional writing by virtue of its self-conscious nature. Auster, not only violates traditional conventions of the time, place, causality, and unity of action, but also he crosses ontological boundaries by creating a character named Paul Auster in *City of Glass*, and by an authorial intrusion in *The Locked Room*, in which the author directly addresses the reader and explains the complexities of the stories.

While referring to the works of Paul Auster, Alik Varvogli rightly observes:

Overt references to the act and the nature of writing and self-conscious subversions of traditional notions of story-telling are never divorced from questions pertaining to urban living, Western history, capitalism, the tyranny of money, and the role of the author in society. Especially in the novels that follow *The New York Trilogy*, a delicate balance is maintained between what can be broadly termed 'realism' and 'experimentation', between an enquiry into the world and an exploration of the nature of the self as it appears in language (2).

As a postmodernist writer, he indulges in the arena of intertextuality. Throughout his fiction, one can find intertextual dialogues between several books. He includes the texts belonging to the American Renaissance, or the works of European writers such as Kafka, Beckett or Hamsun. He discusses American society in his book, but sometimes he focuses more on the philosophical aspects. Alik Varvogli in his book on Paul Auster further states that:

His work may deal with abstract notions, and the emphasis may appear to be on form and style, but many of his chosen themes and tropes are borrowed from the American tradition. He writes about baseball, the Statue of Liberty, the Depression; about the American West and the anonymity of the great city. However, his references to American culture are often subordinated to a larger project of a more philosophical quality (4).

Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* reacts against the universality of reason and the conventions of modern/realistic novel. He also overturns binaries, hierarchies, and suggests plural ways of defining history and reality. Reed improvises on the detective story by interspersing the detective story with several other texts. In addition to this, Reed constantly challenges the reader through exaggeration as a way of attacking simplified rationalization and undermining the notion of absolute truth. Reed mixes the verifiable historical figures and events with fictional ones. He presents a kind of mythical history by including Moses, an Egyptian god and goddess, ageless Knight Templar, and a mysterious ship from Haiti. In his move to unfasten Western metaphysics, Reed's novel problematizes certain hegemonic, naturalized Western or American myths, concepts, beliefs, and historical representations that erase differences and the illusions of essential truths.

It is seen that different writers have their own diverse narrative patterns of writing postmodern fiction. Though the common tendencies and fundamentals appear to be the same, their application is different, and it varies from one culture to the other culture. For example, both Calvino and Burroughs negate the realistic presentations and present a kind of anti-realistic fictions. Calvino talks about the imaginary worlds and Burroughs talks about dreamlike hallucinations of the present time. The way they negate reality is radically different. Latin American writers negate reality by the way of presenting magic realism, a fusion of fact and

fiction/imaginary/dreamlike events. They try to diminish the difference between what is real and what is unreal or magical. There cannot be the strategy common for all the writers from different cultures. Postmodern writers indulge in the play of pluralism and multiplicity while locating their stories in respective local cultures.

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