



THE INDIAN REVIEW OF WORLD LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

A Peer-Reviewed And Indexed Bi-Annual Online Literary Journal

<http://worldlitonline.net/>

ISSN: 0974-097X • Vol 16. No. 1 • January - June 2020



Quest for Ethics amidst Uncertainty: Post-Truth Phenomenon as an Extension to Postmodern Chaos

Dr. S. Priyadarshini.
Assistant Professor of English
Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Uncertainty/Chaos/Confusion:

The twentieth century began as an era of moral perplexity and uncertainty. The rise of scientific spirit and rationalism led to a questioning of accepted beliefs, conventions and traditions. The people turned skeptic towards religion. With the advent of Darwin's Theory of Evolution, the very base of religion was put to trial. Freud's Libido shattered moral orders of the day, eventually, gave rise to moral perplexity; Marx's Marxist ideology broke the old consumption of Divine Right Theory. These conceptualizations resulted in spiritual decay and made people worship science as their demi-gods.

The two World Wars increased tension and frustrations. Political and religious skepticism, disillusionment, cynicism and irony have become the order of the day. Economic depression, unemployment, overpopulation and acute shortage have increased the hardship of life and caused stress and strains and nervous breakdown. There is an atmosphere of moral uneasiness, confusion, uncertainty and chaos everywhere after the two World Wars.

Postmodern Arena:

Chaos is more popular and appropriate term used in the process of description of postmodern arena. The twentieth century science will be remembered for three things: Relativity, Quantum mechanics, and Chaos Theory. Douglas L. Kiel and Euel Elliott argue in *Chaos Theory in the Social Sciences: Foundation* that:

The emerging paradigm of chaos...has profound implications for the previously dominant Newtonian view of a mechanistic and predictable universe. While a Newtonian universe was founded on stability and order, chaos theory teaches that instability and disorder are not only widespread in nature, but essential to the evolution of complexity in the universe. Thus, chaos theory, as relativity theory and quantum theory before it, presents another strike against a singular commitment to the determinism of a Newtonian view of the natural realm. (2)

During the same thirty years that chaos theory has consolidated its place in scientific arena, the literary, artistic, and cultural movement known as postmodernism has become the defining paradigm of late-capitalist and post-industrial western society. The chief characteristic features of postmodernism are its willingness to appropriate discourses from disparate origins and its eagerness to exploit the uncertainty and ambiguity that results from these appropriative acts.

Industrial Revolution and rapid increase in the development of science and technology disabled people to comprehend the prevalent atmosphere. It gave birth to a disturbing phenomenon: What people thought that may happen someday, happened to them so immediately, that they started feeling lost. Alvin Toffler called such a state as “time skip” (16). People were shocked to the core that they no more felt life as men did in the past. The rate of acceleration of “events” (Derrida) were so quick that people failed to cope up with it. Alvin Toffler termed this phenomenon “Future Shock” (11). In an attempt to define future shock, he says, “Future Shock is a time phenomenon, a product of the greatly accelerated rate of change in society. It arises from the superimposition of a new culture on an old one” (11). Precisely stating, future shock is uprooting people from familiarity and root them in unfamiliarity before they could understand and get to grip with it. The highest rate of acceleration in the society caused Schizophrenia among the people. By terming Schizophrenia, unlike Lacan, Jameson’s definition (though Jameson defined it in terms of Lacan’s view) would be appropriate to quote: “schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence” (Jameson 119).

The advancement in science and technology also results in hyper-real condition which tricks the human consciousness and brings in an inability to distinguish physical reality from virtual reality.

Post-Truth

Post-Truth is a political phenomenon that came into regular usage with Donald J. Trump’s election campaign, 2016. Post-Truth is the most debated but paradoxically, least defined term. From an entry made in Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the most celebrated word of the year 2016, Post-Truth is the public burial of objective facts by a deluge of media that appeals to emotion and personal belief instead of facts. A Post-Truth phenomenon is that a greater section of population is ready to ignore fact and even to accept lies willfully. The significance at this phenomenon is given not to the claimed fact but to the felt-truth or to the logically appealing lies. The highlighting feature of the Post-Truth era (not sure whether to call it an era as it is very difficult to define a historical period while being a part of it.) is the dismissal of the objective fact. What is worse than that is, it is an era pregnant with information than a decade or two ago. The most influential impression that ran into every postmodern soul is the avalanche of information supplied by Television. But the experience of being a Post-Truthian is very much different from being a part of Postmodern popular culture. The use of internet and social media as main source of information in the current culture is having a consequence that very few could foresee. A common belief that information yields knowledge is gone reversal and the plurality of information results in the circulation of alternative fact and histories.

The Exigencies

The exigence of such a state would result in general anxiety among people. While discussing about the victory of Trump in the election, Bruce Mc Comiskey, in his book *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition* says,

Trump did not win this election in the usual way, with an occasional negative ad but in general using sincere argumentation and ethical persuasion in order to demonstrate that has the most relevant experience and the best plan to move the country forward. Instead, Trump won the election using unethical rhetoric strategies like alt-right fake news, vague social media posts, policy reversal, denials of meaning attacks on media credibility, name-calling and so on. (3)

Comiskey constantly argues that all of Trump's unethical rhetoric strategies were constantly and repeatedly broadcasted in the television which affected the public to a great extent that it was named as "the Trump effect" and resulted in increase in violence and hatredness which made him win the election adversely, though not healthily.

As a reaction to Trump's Unethical rhetoric, organizations such as Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) reinforce the core values of ethics, diversity, inclusion and respect.

It is not just the organizations that insist on ethics and respect but also the public. There arise a fear of World going nowhere but to a dark abyss with the negative impulse. George Orwell's words keep reflecting all over as he said, "During times of Universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act" (73). As the organizations of America demand, getting back to ethics would relieve people from chaos that prevails in the mind of people since Post War.

The postmodern claim of 'multiple truths' or 'no-truth' concepts ultimately lead the forthcoming generation to search for a single consolidated truth element that could relieve them from the turbulence of multiple and alternative facts that they collect from the fast pacing move of the media. The social media expose the present generation whom Mark Prensky calls 'Digital Native' to millions of facts and a number of theories and twice a number of controversial theories leaving them in a messy state. It is an acknowledged fact that both the postmodern theorist and the Post-Truth expertise admit that surplus of information lead to loss of the 'Real'. The quest for reality, truth and ethics will be the future concern of the society which is the result of the current post-truth phenomenon, may either be treated as a reaction to postmodernism or an extension to the same.

Works Cited

- Bertens, Hans. *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. London : Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Kiel, Douglas L. and Euel Elliott. *Chaos Theory in the Social Sciences: Foundations and Applications*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. Print.
- Jameson, Frederic. "Postmodernism and consumer society." *The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. Julian Wolfrey. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. Print.
- Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Stratford: Stratford University Press, 1988. Print.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Orient Longman, 2001. Print.
- Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam Books, 1971. Print.