

New Historicism: An Intensive Analysis and Appraisal

Rajani Sharma

New Historicism, the most innovative critical movement, came in existence in 1980 because of the critical manifesto of Stephen Greenblatt, “an award winning literary critic, theorist and scholar” who coined this very term New Historicism for the first time with an intention to propound new critical methods for interpreting the Renaissance texts (“Stephen J. Greenblatt” Wikipedia). This term occurs in his treatise *The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the Renaissance*. He himself refers to the genesis of this critical trend in his essay “Towards a Poetics of Culture” when he worked on a project: “A few years ago I was asked by Genre to edit a selection of Renaissance essays and I said ok. I collected a bunch of essay and then, out of a kind of desperation to get introduction done, I wrote that the essays represented something I called ‘new historicism’” (Greenblatt). Though this critical canon got its official grounding in 1980s but new historical insights could be sensed in critical essays of the late 1970s: “[...] the grand breaking text was the 1980s publication of Stephen Greenblatt’s, *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. This book was followed in 1983 by the founding of the *Journal Representation*, initiated by Greenblatt and several of his colleagues at the University of California at Berkeley, where *The Journal* is still published” (Murray 806-809). Besides Stephen Greenblatt, other major new historicists are Jonathan Goldberg, Jean Howard, Edward Pechter, Catherine, Louis Advain Montrose and D.A. Miller at U.C, San Diego.

In twentieth century various critical theories and movements came in a sequel of one another like New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism, and Deconstruction with their specific premise of linguistic aspects of a work of art. New criticism emerged as a revolt against historical and biographical approaches to literature by turning the readership from history to text with a notion of “close textual analysis” (Ryan 128) Akin to New Criticism, formalism also approached to cultivate the canon of artistic technique at the expense of content and propounded that form is to be emphasized as the chief criterion of aesthetic value, hence it also focuses on the form of the text. Both the movements were concerned with the text “as an autonomous entity” (Das 169) Structuralism also sees ‘text as an objective structure’ with its science of signs as relational entities activating various codes and conventions quite independent of author, reader and external reality. It again focuses on the play of signs and signified. Roger Webster has well remarked in *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction* that “language is.....a two-fold or binary system. Such a system consists of a code which is conveyed through verbal as visual sign which have agreed concepts as meaning attached” (33). It implies that Structuralism took into account the structure of the text and play of signs and signifieds, though in extreme form. Deconstruction was also based on the text and made it “volatile by propagating the indeterminacy of meaning and advocating the ‘free play’ of signifiers without a center (Das 189). All these approaches consider literature only as text which is autonomous and has nothing to do with culture and society in which it originates. In fact, New Historicism came as a wider reaction to all these purely linguistic, textual and formal approaches, however, considering it as a complete rejection of all these approaches cannot be justified rather its emergence is a corrective for all these critical canons to fill the pitfalls of these approaches by providing with an appropriate methodology to study literature.

New historicism is a critical approach which disrupts the extremity of purely formal and linguistic critical canon and dogmatism of close textual analysis of a work at the expense of extrinsic value embedded implicitly in its intrinsic part. These purely formal approaches lay emphasis on the fact that since text is the ultimate reality with the reader, he needs not go beyond that and should try to find out finer meaning by locating the free play of signs and signified or the process of signification to ascertain aesthetic value. On the other hand, New Historicists opine that to locate solely linguistic and textual features of a piece of writing is to see one side of the coin, rather a text can find proper interpretation if the conditions of its production are also previewed because “New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of its time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated creation of genius” (“Stephen J. Greenblatt” *Wikipedia*) New historicists consider any texts as cultural construct, whether that text is literary or non literary belonging to other disciplines of knowledge rather than a creation coming into existence due to divine power of genius as S.T. Coleridge suggests in his *Biographia Literaria*. Moreover, New Historicism aims at rehistoricization of text whether literary and non-literary and ascribes due significance to the cultural condition of its production, meaning, impact, its interpretation and evaluation, that is, a literary text is produced and actualized in cultural conditions, not in vacuum. Nonetheless, it should not be taken as a return to traditional school of Historicism “for the views and practices of the New Historicism differ markedly from those of former scholars who had adverted to social and intellectual history as ‘background’ against which to set work of literature as a independent entity, or had viewed literature as a reflection of the world view characteristic of the period” (Abrams 183). Unlike old school of Historicism, New Historicism “operates by fusing ‘linguistic turn’ of post structuralism and deconstruction and a return to historical readings” (Murray 806-809). New historicism offers a substantial methodology to study literature as a text as it assimilates linguistic turn of Post Structuralism and indeterminate nature of literary text propounded by deconstructionists which always remain under erasure. These approaches tend to close textual analysis of a work; however, the nexus between New Historicism and these linguistic approaches cannot be undermined because literature also carries its own historicity.

As regards the nexus of New Historicism with Post Structuralism, New Historicism tends to adopt the fundamental methodology of Post Structuralism which in its own turn came to react against structuralisms’ pretension of scientific objectivity. Though Post Structuralism covers the philosophical deconstruction of Derrida along with psychoanalytical theories of Lacan and Kristeva yet it also borrows from the historical and cultural critique of Michel Foucault and the cultural-political writings of Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze. Since Post Structuralism conjoins the textual aspect of study stressing the linguistic signs with instability of meanings attached to them, but linguistic signs and text cannot be actualized and interpreted in cultural vacuity. W.J. Courthope, a nineteenth century critic suggests the importance of language which weaves the web of any text as “language is the instrument of thought” and thoughts are too culturally determined and “the study of language was allowed to predominate over the study of literature” (313). Apart from this, Structuralism is criticized because of its one sided mechanical nature as it tends to consider every human activity as sign whether it is code or convention, hence Post-Structuralism came to encompass all human sciences in its circle. M.H. Abrams remarks in this concern: “In most cases, this account is held to apply not only to verbal language but also to psycho-

sexual and socio-cultural signifying system. As a consequence, the pursuit of literary criticism is conceived to be integral with all the other pursuits traditionally distinguished as ‘human sciences’ (239). This suggests that text is embedded in cultural roots because it is a cultural construct. Post Structuralism provides a valid ground to New Historicism to incorporate social studies as knowledge product and hence New Historicism can be considered as an extension of Post Structuralism. This reciprocal relation between Post Structuralism and New Historicism reminds the catchphrase of Louis Montrose: “The historicity of the text and textuality of history.’ Text, he insists, (as do all New Historicist Critics) are embedded in particular histories, since we only access those histories in language” (Abrams 183). Charis Baldick’s remark in *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* is noteworthy:

New historicism [is] a term applied to a trend in American academic literary texts and at the same time (in contrast with older historicisms) the ‘textual’ nature of history. As a part of a wider reaction against purely formal or linguistic critical approaches . . . , New historicists, led by Stephen Greenblatt, drew new connections between literary and non literary texts, breaking down the familiar distinction between a text and its historical ‘background’ as conceived in established historical forms of criticism.” (171)

History cannot be accessed except in its textual form and this canon of textuality of history and historicity of text pulls down the line of demarcation between literary and non-literary text. As Renu Paul Ukkan has rightly observed when she remarks “New Historicism involves a parallel reading or juxtaposition of the literary and the non-literary text of the same historical period. Both are given equal importance and allowed to work as sources of information and interrogation with each other” (22-33). This notion of historicity of the text and textuality of history opens up an innovative mode of textual study which is intertextuality. “Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to denote the interdependence of literary text with all those that have gone before it. Her contention was that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon . . . and that any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” It implies that literary text is akin to any other texts pertaining to other disciplines of knowledge in that particular socio-cultural scenario. ‘Intertextual,’ in turn, draws attention to other notion of ‘con-text,’ implying no difference between literary and historical text for New Historicists because “[t]his way, the non-literary text becomes not a con-text but a co-text, along with literary work. The literary text is placed with the framework of non-literary text which is closely read” (Cuddon 424). N. Krishnaswamy remarks that “New Historicism is an approach that advocates the parallel reading of literary and non literary text, usually of the same period, in other words, the non-literary text becomes a co-text of the literary text. The literary text is not privileged against the background of historical and non-literary text. The textuality of history and historicity of texts are given equal weight in New Historicism” (86). Hence, the distinction between literary and non literary text becomes almost negligible as both intersect each other as co-texts rather than context.

The critical strategy adopted by New Historicists is quite significant because they give equal significance to text and its embedded historicity. To quote *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism*: “Since all . . . texts use language which is seen as elusive and unfixed, ‘textual’ history effectively calls for the kinds of close reading strategies which, as Stephen Greenblatt remarks [,] . . . literary critics have as part of their disciplinary tool kit” (Murry 806-809). The close textual study requires painstaking effort

at the end of a critic to understand the meaning of a text as Don E. Wayne refers to the methodology of reading for New Historicists, "The best of new historicists are nothing if they are not excellent readers. And it is precisely in the reading they have produced that these critics have gained their legitimacy and their power" (791-805).

New Historicists, greatly influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of discursive analysis of Power relation, come to give another strategy of political reading of the texts. The power relations get reflected through discourses which do not find overt manifestations but implicitly expressed in the text. New Historicists are "influenced by the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault who focused upon the intricately structured power relations in a given culture at a given time to demonstrate, how that society controls its member through constructing and defining what appears to be universal." It implies that New Historicists "aspired to a politics of culture" which is covertly manifested in a text because power structure is administered by the state. "The state's control of its citizenry was internal rather than external. The state subjected its people by creating them as subjects, devising fixed categories under which people could be described and thus controlled. This was the conjunction Foucault evoked as Power Knowledge" (Murry 806-809).

Such categories as sane / insane, homosexual / heterosexual, male / female, slave / freed are controlled and regulated by 'Power Politics' through indirect ideological pressures of micro-discursive forces of disciplinary powers. Literature influences and is influenced by these micro-forces running parallel in the society of which it is a product and hence controls and also in turn is controlled by them as an operator of power and operated by the same power. Michel Rayn refers to the influence of Foucauldian power politics on textual historicity of New Historicists: "The New Historicists were primarily influenced by the analysis of power and the historical studies of Michel Foucault, whose work shifted critical interest from the macro-narratives of politics and economics . . . toward the micro-logical discursive practices" (29).

The New Historicists have drawn upon Foucauldian tenet of discursive nature of literature which is a cultural construct; however, a complete harmony in society is illusory because constant but repressed struggles keep on running parallel between powerful and powerless in the society. In literature, the suppressive and marginalized voices against dominant power structure and stricture is heard implicitly, meaning thereby, text does not display the dominant and overt history, however hidden history or histories are intertwined in literature. William Shakespeare's famous play *King Lear* displays the covert histories of sixteenth century. Coke in the court of King James challenges his authority and replies that "the king cannot take any cause out of any of his court and give judgment upon it himself" (Ryan 129). James accused him of treason. The event gets manifested in the play when King Lear divides the whole of his kingdom between his two daughters because of their false show of affection towards him and takes away her [Cordelia's] moiety of the realm" (Ryan 129). The Earl of Kent interposes on behalf of Cordelia and is banished from the kingdom on account of his disloyalty towards King Lear. On the basis of this discussion, it comes out that the repressed voices weaves the web of literary text and configures the discursive nature of text.

Apart from Foucauldian influence on New Historical critical canon, the impact of famous anthropologists Clifford Greetz cannot be undermined because New historicists begin to take texts as thick descriptions of culture. As Renu Paul Ukkan has remarked:

This sort of analysis makes New Historicism establishes Clifford Geertz's use of the term 'thick descriptions'. Colebrook explains that Geertz employs the term in the New Historicist way of analyzing a particular social event which as meaning for people involved and discovering the patterns of conventions, codes and modes of thinking that attribute those meanings to cultural event. (22-36)

What Geertz opines in this concern is that a writer "thickly describes... [and] unearths the underlying meaningful structures of local events and local interactions and from those interactions generalizes whole societies" (Murry 806-809). Geertz suggests that an anthropologist does a scientific and systematic study of a given culture and human races and tells as to how power structure operates and exercises its impact on human being. He works upon a minor event and incident and tries to give the very spirit of culture in the form of thick description. Hence, New Historicists should take a single event, scene or excerpt which gives rise to the fragmented voices and denotes happenings in any texts and tries to analyze it in the light of thick description exhibited implicitly in the text at hand. This is the main reason that "Cultural Poetics' is sired by Stephen Greenblatt and 'thick description' can be taken as another name for Cultural Poetics.' It is to be taken into account that Greenblatt himself coined the term New Historicism, but he then thought about it for the second time and admitted that he used New Historicism inadvertently and would prefer 'Cultural Poetics' to it. Renu Paul Ukkan has remarked:

Rather than seeking the meaning in the intention or mental content of either the author or the work we could focus on the effect of the text in a network of practices. We could see the text as an effective symbol; a social fact which makes action meaningful and is a part of a culture's way of performing its action in an ordered and understandable way. Description of texts would be 'thick' if they referred to the social and cultural forms in which the text operated. (22-33)

Moreover, Geertz thought event as an art objects and thus, showed New Historian a new way to study text. Geertz believes that with the help of a single event in the given cultural scenario, an ethnographer generalizes the whole working of a culture. A literary artist too like an ethnographer belongs to a particular era. Though he perceives very small part of it yet on the basis of his 'synthetic faculty,' offers the complete picture of the scenario which gets manifested in the literary text. This suggests that the literary text is also a craftwork on the part of the artist. As is obvious from Geertz's end that events are crafted in text, this critical canon suggests the 'fictional' element in the text. So a New Historicist should study any texts by taking into account its fictional aspect. It is explicitly mentioned in *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Literary Criticism* that "he [Geertz] always reminded them [New Historicists] that the descriptions of this 'real world' were also fiction, text wrought and crafted" (Murry 806-809).

What Geertz opines is that the ethnographer always remains present in the project report if not overtly, at least behind the construction of the text. As regards New Historicist, he cannot penetrate the Renaissance culture with that efficacy as the writer of the text might have done during the production of the text; hence Stephen Greenblat allows the strategy of speaking with the dead, as an ethnographer and writer speak with the living being while alive, so the reader / critic and New Historicist can speak with the writer through his text, thus positioning the new historicist as a second interpreter. Thus a New Historicist tries to read the text of a past author who was present in his own time as an ethnographer. Seturaman remarks that this condition does not allow a New Historicist to be objective in his study of the work composed in remote past: "The New

Historicism, while trying to understand history cannot be objective and we can never recover the past without our own present self modifying what used to be considered objective and stable" (574). Likewise, Jackson too speaks with the same canon as he writes:

Nevertheless, as readers of past literature, we are demonstrably decayed because we do not bring to it the experience that it required for its imaginative and intellectual realization in its own time; instead we bring the experience that is required for the realization of literature in our time, an experience in which only fragments of the earlier experience survive. The consequence is in several respects analogous to the antique statue's loss of limbs. (38)

Just as an antique and broken image needs repair to come in its previous condition, similarly the text can be actualized by the reader with his present perception because through this he tries to reconstruct the past with his imaginative faculty, while at the same time maintaining a close nexus with the present too. The suggestion being that the New Historicists lay emphasis on the necessity of awareness of the critic while analyzing a text because he belongs to present but has to read the text written in the past and has to reconstruct the past with two sorts of historicity working parallel. D.G Myres has remarked:

As a consequence, the historian/critic is trapped in his own 'historicity'. No one can rise above his own social formations, his own ideological upbringing in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it. Given this fact, the best a modern approach to literature can hope to accomplish ... [,] to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology. (27-36)

Hence, New Historicist's strategy to study literary text is to take text as the primary source on which reader's present conditions and his reconstructive faculty operate and thus impose a meaning therein:

New historicists acknowledge that they themselves, like all authors, are 'subjectivities' that have been shaped and informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to their era, hence that their own critical writings in great part construct, rather than discover ready-made, the textual meanings they describe and the literary and cultural histories they narrate. To mitigate the risk that they will unquestionably appropriate texts that were written in the past, they stress that the course of history between the past and present is not coherent, but exhibits discontinuities, breaks, and ruptures; by doing so, they hope to 'distance' and 'estrangle' an earlier text and so sharpen their ability to detect its differences from their present ideological assumptions. Some historicists present their readings of text written in the past as (in their favoured metaphor) 'negotiation' between past and present. (Abrams 186)

New Historicists again points out that New Historical critical approach stresses on the political reading of the text because any texts whether literary or non-literary is a cultural construct and reveals political, social, religious and economical circumstances of the given era. M.H Abrams says:

[P]olitical readings of a literary text— [is the] reading in which they [New Historicists] stress quasi-Freudian mechanism such as 'suppression' 'displacement,' and 'substitution' by which, they assert, a writer's political

ideology (in a process of which the writer remains largely or entirely unaware) inevitably disguises, or entirely elides into silence and 'absence,' the circumstances and contradiction of contemporary history. The primary aim of political reader is to undo these ideological disguises and suppression in order to uncover the historical and political conflicts and oppressions which are the text's true, although covert or unmentioned, subject matter. (187)

M.H. Abram's statement suggests that New Historicists are greatly influenced by such theorists as Ronald Barthes and Michel Foucault who ascribe significance to text which is discursive in nature and denies the presence of 'empirical self' of the author but at the same cannot dismiss the 'implied self' of the author. Ronald Barthes informs that "the author cannot come back into text [,] . . . he can only do so as guest" (Das 107). It suffices the notion that a writer appears in his writing as disguised in his ideologies which gets manifested unconsciously in the text. The writer appears to be consciously unconscious in order to conceal his identity under the coverings of his ideologies and the presence of certain ideologies again reveal that the author is influenced by his own cultural conditions and that he also knows the role he plays is not of a social reformer but just to give the hint to the readers. Thus, a complete suppression of the self is not possible because he is a sensible and sensitive intellectual of the society. "The New Historicists seem to manifest... tendency to decenter, and in extreme cases to delete what is often called 'agency of author as a self-coherent, purposive and determinative human subject. Moreover, the self of the author is in the grip of 'controllable workings of the unconscious compulsions towards culture'" (187).

Again, apart from political reading of the text, New Historicists also suggest that since literary text embodies numerous voices and is discursive in nature, hence, an innovative process of reading is but a quintessential methodology to be adopted and that best method is of dismantling the text which is the prominent feature of deconstruction. This validates that fact that after dismantling the texts the multiplicity of meaning be put forth "to present a number of independent and often conflicting voices. In the same way New Historicist contends that a work is not an autonomous body of fixed meanings, but represents a diversity of dissonant voices and unresolved conflicts in a specific culture" (Ukkan 22-33). This is because "the textuality of the text leads to its textuality is closer to deconstructive method of studying the text through its 'polysemy' and expanding traces" (Kar 223). Since text is the product of society and embodies it and hence contains multiple meanings as Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogic' nature of text overlaps with this. Roger Webster says that language for Bakhtin has the potentiality of multiplicity because language "for Bakhtin is not in any sense fixed and stable but always in a state of flux; meaning is never singular and uncontested but rather plural and contested" (40). According to Bakhtin language is dialogic and the text displays 'many voiced' and 'hetreglossia.'

Moreover, New Historicists do not treat text devoid of its literary qualities, though they suggest that there is no distinction between literary and historical texts. Through its literary attributes, a literary text renders aesthetic pleasure which is the focal purpose of any literary texts. To quote Rene Wellek and Austin Warren:

There is great literature which has little or no social relevance; social literature is only one kind of literature and is not central in the theory of literature unless one holds the view that literature is primarily an 'imitation' of life as it is and of social

life in particular. But literature is no substitute for sociology or politics. It has its own justification and aim. (Wellek and Warren 104)

Moreover, meter, rhythm, symbols and imagery enhance the aesthetic pleasure for the reader but literature with figurative language but devoid of its social relevance too cannot render aesthetic delight which is its sole aim.

In order to establish this literary canon, New Historicism coins 'Cultural Poetics' as a guideline for literary study because literature is an organic part of culture and manifests each and every aspect of it. It subsumes that literature portrays 'world view' but world view should not be mistaken with the harmonious representation of socio-cultural scenario, rather, the projection of both harmony and heterogeneity should reflect in literary text as subversive voices against the dominant power politics are continuously raised and superseded. In *The Tempest*, Prospero represents the colonialist and Caliban, the Red Indian. The episode denotes as to how Prospero wants to exercise his power over Caliban and how he tries to flout his power by abusing him. Caliban is powerless hence his protest is superseded. It depicts the heterogeneity of Elizabethan period through this anecdote depicted in Shakespearean play. What New Historicists try to demonstrate is the relation between literature and culture. To quote D.G. Myres:

It is in this sense that the works of literature such as *Midsummer Night's Dream* are 'representation' of the culture from which they emerge. They are emanations, active agents of the culture's circumvent ideology.... the term 'representation' is misleading in so far as it suggests a mimetic theory of literature. Nothing could be further from New Historical truths. In fact, the New Historicism presumes that artistic fiction does not imitate human action; it mediates it. That is, fiction is defined as lens through which certain portrait of human experience is brought into focus. (27-36)

In fact, the relation between literature and history is dialectic. Whatever happens in the society is presented literature and any other discursive texts through anecdotes. To illustrate this point, let's discuss an actual event. It so happened in 1976 that a convict Gary Gilmore was released from a federal jail and then he moved to Prove Utah. After a few months, he started robbery and murdered two gentlemen and was once again arrested. During his trial session, Gilmore asked to be executed as his punishment. As a result of this demand, his case became famous and attracted the attention of media. Norman Mailer, Jere Herezenber and a hack writer conducted his interviews and wrote documentary on his life and court proceedings; they also collected his personal letters which he used to exchange with his girlfriend. On the basis of these sources, Mailer wrote *The Executioner's Song: A True Life Novel* which combines romantic, poetic and realistic elements and this novel became so famous that a T.V. series would also be shown on T.V. It implies that this novel is based on the real life story but the fictional and literary elements weaves the web its text to give aesthetic pleasure. The reality presented in this novel is hyper one to pull down the demarcation line between literary and non-literary text.

Cultural materialism, another offshoot of New Historicism is the British Counterpart and was popularized by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield when they edited *Political Shakespeare* (1994). Krishnaswamy has well remarked in this concern: "A politicized frame work in cultural materialism includes the historical context, theoretical approaches, and textual analysis with political commitment. Cultural materialism is described as 'a politicized form of historiography'" (85). The major influence is that of Raymond William and its principles are like Marxism, notably that culture and cultural

artifacts such as literature cannot ‘transcend’ the material conditions of its production and economic contexts of its circulation. “They are also interested,” says Cuddon, “in the ways in which the meanings of literary and dramatic works are made in new social and institutional contexts, especially in restaging of Shakespeare” (546). Moreover, it will *develop a keener historical sense and create a cross-cultural context for any text*. Among cultural materialists are Alan Sinfield, Catherine Belsey and Jonathan Dollimore. As regards ‘Cultural Materialism,’ it propounds that a literary text is the product of culture, in which it is consumed and circulated. If it is purely idealistic, it cannot appeal the reader and its circulation would be hampered.

The main premise of New Historicists is to highlight the subversive forces of marginalized community of the society like female, bourgeoisie and ethnic communities of Non-European origin. It may be assumed that New Historicism shares the tenet of Marxism as it tries to find out the conflict between the suppressed and the dominant like that of Capitalist and Proletariat. The whole social structure revolves round the problem of production and its circulation, but Cultural Materialists extend it towards the larger web of culture. New Historicists’ main motive is to find out the subversive voices in literary text so that society may be awakened regarding the exploitation of marginalized community:

New Historicist looked for a more dynamic relationship between texts and their societies. If a society could be shown to form a text, then you could also show that texts in turn reshaped from which they came. For New Historicist understood Marshall M.C Luhan’s sound bite, the medium is the message as a fundamental truism they wished to write about the form of power, they sought to show the power of literary forms to reshape the world, to assert than to prove beguiling rather a demonstrable fact for a lyric poem which can be shown, turned out to be hard to find. (Murray 806-809)

While dealing with New Historicism, it is required to understand the basic distinction between Historicism and New Historicism because a thin line of difference is visible between the two.

- (1) Historical school of criticism considers literature as a separate entity which has its specific literary qualities. According to Historicism, a work is to be studied against the background in which it is originated. Now the question arises as to how a reader belonging to present time can go to the past background. It is impossible for him and in such a situation, he can take help of co-texts and New Historicism claims of co-textual study.
- (2) Moreover, historicists are of the opinion that a historical study is objective; however this is a misconception at their end because when a reader comes to read a text, his previous and accumulated knowledge along with personal interests would be included in his speculation. Even a historian cannot help bringing his personal likings while doing investigation of the facts. Same is the case with a literary artist; he presents reality of a particular society in a slice and crafts it with his own imaginative faculty. Similarly, historical critics / readers, despite their great efforts to be objective, cannot maintain their assumption.

New Historicism might have gained momentum in its popularity as a new approach, but it is being criticized because it has certain limitations like the lack of intellectual coherence and a systematic way to pave the way of a reader and critic to

study a text at hand. However, to criticize New Historicism on this ground seems whimsical. In fact, this critical approach encompasses within its methodological folds such critical tenets as adopted by Marxism, Historical and Psychological approaches, hence it came as a corrective and a pluralistic method of study.

Moreover, this approach is again criticized for not being impartial in its methodology because New Historicists “ignored writings by minorities To some critics New Historicists were not . . . political enough” (Murry 806-809). It seems to be wrong judgment on the part of critics because they do not pay attention to their merging with the Feministic and Postcolonial approaches to literature. New Historicists are of the opinion that literature should give voice to subaltern group of society. “The strategy of ‘Thick description’ and the local reading of power relationship could be seen subaltern studies and post colonial approaches. New Historicism could also be seen as fertilizing feminist scholarship as well as gender studies themselves and its offshoots in queen theory” (Murray 806-809).

To conclude, it can be assumed that this critical approach takes into account the intrinsic as well as extrinsic approaches and can be assumed to be as ‘interdisciplinary mode of criticism.’ Louis Montrose suggests that New Historic mode of study takes into account ‘the historicity of the text and textuality of history,’ meaning thereby that words, structure and form are the primary things for the reader’s disposal, however, the content plays a very significant role to give aesthetic delight to the reader, meaning thereby, that fairy tale elements in a text cannot draw the attention of the serious reader of the text because it is devoid of its historicity. As Jonathan Culler has written in *Twentieth Century American criticism*, “It is only very recently that we have been able to begin to break out of this structure in which the New Criticism imprisoned us, only recently that we have been able to think of new ways in which one might write about literature in an interdisciplinary mode” (30). In fact, with the emergence of this New Historicism, interdisciplinary critical approach has acquired a pulpit and that it has not reached its climax as yet rather moving ahead, assimilating newer than new methods of literary study with the passage of time. Perhaps New Historicist seems to imply to the readers, as Richard Hoggart has remarked in an anthology entitled as *Contemporary Criticism*:

All the time one has to keep in mind the three major elements in a work of literature: the aesthetic, the psychological and cultural. Briefly, the first points to those characteristics which have been predominantly decided by aesthetic needs, by the work of art, as a formal structure, a type of ‘fiction’ or gratuitous ‘making. The psychological elements are those which seem preeminently to have been decided by the make-up of the particular individual who wrote that particular book. The cultural elements are those which seem chiefly to have been decided by the fact that this book was written in a certain kind of society at a certain period. But, of course, the first two elements are to some extent culturally conditioned and none of them is strictly separable from the others. (161)

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Australia: Thomson and Heine. 1999.
- Baldick, Chris. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Courthrope, W.J. *Liberty and Authenticity in Matters of Taste*. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Cuddon, J.A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

Das, Bijay Kumar. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Towards a Poetics of Culture." *The New Historicism*. Ed. H.M. Aram Veesser. New York: Routledge, 1986. 16 March 2006 <<http://social.classncsuedu/wyrick/DEBCLASS/greenb.html>>

Hoggart, Richard. "Contemporary Cultural Studies: An Approach to the Study of Literature and Society." *Contemporary Criticism: Stratford Upon-Avon Studies*. Ed.

Makolm Bradbury and David Palmer. London: Edward Arnold, 1970.

"Stephen J. Greenblatt", *From Wikipedia : The Free Encyclopedia*, 20 Mar. 2006< [jpg/wiki/image Stephen Green jpg](http://wiki/image/Stephen_Green.jpg) >.

Jackson, J.R. de. J. *Historical Criticism and Meaning of the Text*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Kar, Prafulla C. "The Persistence of Deconstruction." *Critical Theory: Western and Indian*. Ed. Prafulla C. Kar. Delhi: Pencraft International, 1997.

Krishnaswamy, N. *Contemporary Literary Theory: A Student's Companion*. New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd, 2001.

Murry, Chris. *Encyclopedia of Literary Critics and Criticism* vol. 2 London: FitzroyDearborn Publishers, 1999.

Myers, D.G. "New Historicism in Literary Study." *Academic Questions* 2 (Winter 1988-89): 16 March 2006 <<http://www.english.tamu.edu/pers/fac/myers/historicism/html>>

Ryan, Michael. *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1999.

Steuraman, V.S. ed. *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology*. Chennai: Macmillan India Ltd., 1989.

Ukkan, Renu Paul. "Approaching New Historicism." *Critical Practice* 12.2 (June 2004) 22-36.

Wayne, Don E. "New Historicism." *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*. Ed. Martin Coyle, et al. London: Routledge, 1990.

Webster, Roger. *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Arnold, 1990.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. *The Theory of Literature*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1973.

**Dr. Rajani Sharma PhD.,
Academician and Research Professional in English,
HNB Garhwal Central University,
Uttarakhand, India.**