An Overview on Marxist Criticism

Dr. Surendra Kumar Sao
Assistant Professor (English)
Govt. College, Kusmi
Distt. Balrampur (C.G.)

Abstract :-

Marxist criticism considers the literature of any given period as products of the socio-economic structures specific to that time. Marxist criticism is based on the economic and cultural theory of Karl Marx (.1818-1883) and his fellow thinker Friedrich Engels. The Marxists critics are very much conscious about their opinion. A Marxist critic is very clear about his writing. They propagated that the text should be read with all informing philosophy. So far, the Marxist view of history is concerned; the class struggle is the essence of Marxism. Besides, there is also the communion between literature and the economic structure of society in the Marxist view.

Keywords : Marxist, Superstructure reciprocity, folklore, ideology.

Introduction :

Raymond Williams view is that any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of determining base and a determined superstructure, Marxist considers that it is not the consciousness of human being that determines their living, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their conscious. According to Pater Barry:

> Marxism is a materialist philosophy that is it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a. world, or forces beyond the natural world .around us, and the society we live in It looks for concrete, scientific, logical explanations of world of observable fact. (156)

Criticism does not produce a uniform critical response. John Peck and Martin Coyle think about Marxist criticism that it is lively and varied, and, despite the collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe, still evolving. A crude Marxist might simply dismiss all literature-as a bourgeois luxury in which middle class authors write about their middle class problems.

Marx believed that only the material interest of the dominant class determines our existence. The Marxist model of society has the material means of production, distribution and exchange as the 'base' and the systems like language, literature, art, culture as the over manifestation-'superstructure', The cultural world of ideas, art, religion, law is determined by the nature of the economic base, which is known as economic determinism, or in other words, the superstructure is the consequence of the base. Marx and Engels claim that the history of mankind is determined by the changing , mode of it's material production-that changes, the overall economic organization, which effects a change in the social class structure, giving -rise to .a period of struggle between, the dominate and subordinate classes for, economic, social and political advantage and the

human consciousness is constituted by ideology by which we .mean the, belief; values and way of thinking; the ideology is the product of the position and interests of the dominant class. Marx considered ideology to be the product of the socioeconomic system but Engels represents it as. 'false consciousnesses as it embodied the interest of the bourgeoisie, the owners-of the material means of production and distribution of wealth.

Marxist criticism establishes its, theory, and practice especially on the following claims:

1. The changing mode of 'material production' determines largely the evolving history of humanity, his social groupings and relations, its institutions, and its-ways of/thinking. By the very term, "material production means, its. overall, economic organization for producing and disturbing material goods.
2. The class structure of society is influenced or is changed, if historical change happens in the fundamental mode of 'material production.' It sets up in each era, a struggle for economic, political and social advantage.
3. Ideology constitutes Human Consciousness, which is. the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive. The Product of the position and interests of a. particular class are called an ideology. The dominant ideology resembles, and helps to legitimize and perpetuate the enthusiasm of the dominant economic and social class.

In fact, Marxist critics have often disclosed a reverence for art, conceiving that, through literature the writer can **see** the shortcoming of society. The manner of traditional Marxist criticism is meant for reconstruction an outlook of the past from historical evidence, and then to prove the accuracy of a particular text in its representation and understanding of this social reality. Marxists are much more attracted to reality.

Marx and Engels did not put any comprehensive theory of literature. Their views on art and literature seem to be relaxed, for they believe in the autonomous status of good art and literature which prevails from the economic circumstances, even though these facts arc it's determinant. They had reverence for good art and literature, which was typical of their class.

The Marxist critic, George Lukas has always shown great interest in the realistic novel, where the full picture of society is presented. Indeed, traditional Marxist criticism is the single ways of connecting the text to a view of the social reality of the time in which it was written. Raymond William's The English Novel form Dickens to Lawrence (1970) is a very authentic and influential example of such criticism.

We should conceive that, though the Marxist criticism is related with material living conditions; the Marxist critic contemplates more theoretical question about the ideology of texts and the function of art in society. Structuralism has induced to sharpen such relations. Structuralism gives importance to the constructed nature of the literary text, where the traditional Marxist criticism, marks the fullness and coherence of literary texts.

Louis Althusser and Pireer Macherey are the two Critics, who are most prominent and influential, and developed theoretical Marxist thinking about literature. Macherey presented argument that the reader can see what he text is hiding from itself. According to Althusser, the texts are not complete in itself, and contradictory as their ideology such as the ideas, values and political beliefs, related to the texts, moves towards difficulties. Thus, it is clear from the opinions of the both critics that the issues raised in a text are too complex for the author.

Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, the two maverick German Marxists also support modernist and nonrealistic art. They have influenced greatly, to non-Marxist and Marxist criticism. Brecht dismissed the 'Aristotelian' concept of a tragic play, in his own dramatic writing or his critical theory, Brecht cited instead that an^ episodic plot should deliberately destroy the illusion of reality, by heroes who do not attract the audience's sympathy. It produces an 'alienation effect'. The result of such alienation will be to disagree audiences out of their passive acceptance of modern capitalist society as a natural way of life. Brecht rejected the Aristotelian theory of art as an imitation of reality and believed that the complacent acceptance of capitalist society should be shattered by creating characters that do not attract the audience's sympathy thereby giving a critical understanding of the capitalist society.

The Italian communist Antonio Gramsci composed nearly thirty documents on political, social and cultural subject, during his imprisonment, between 1929 and 1935. These documents are known as the 'prison notebooks'. According to M.H. Abrams:

Gramsci maintains the original Marxist distinction between the economic base and the cultural superstructure, but replaces the older notion that culture is a disguised 'reflection' of the material base with the concept that the relation between the two is one of 'reciprocity', or interactive influence. Gramsci places special emphasis on the popular, as opposed to the Elite elements of culture, ranging from folklore and popular music to the cinema. (149)

This most widely echoed concept of Gramsci is hegemony. Since 1940, Gramsci's prison writing has gained wide popularity, especially among literary and social critics like Terry Eagleton in England, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said.

Raymond Williams of England-composed many social and critical writings, .which reveal his. concept of Marxism to his humanistic concern with the overall texture of an individual has 'lived experience'. A prominent and leading person, whose theory of Marxist criticism earned popularity in England, is Terry Eagleton, He has expanded and elaborated the concepts of Althusser and Macherey into his own view.

Among the prominent American theorist, Fredric Jameson is the most important of the current Marxist critic. Jameson's modes of criticism can be applied at various stages of the critical interpretation of a literal work. However, according to his idea, Marxist criticism 'subsumes' all the other 'interpretative modes' by retaining their positive findings within a 'political interpretation of literary texts' which stands as the 'final' or 'absolute' horizon of all reading and all interpretation. Jameson's assertion is the revolutionary one in process of the collective struggle to wrest a realm of freedom from a realm of necessity. According to M.H. Abrams:

> In the final stage of an interpretation, Jameson holds, the Marxist critic 'rewrites', in the mode of allegory, the literary text in such a way that the (text) may be seen as the ... reconstruction of a prior historical or ideological subtext i.e. of the text's unspoken, because repressed and unconscious, awareness of the ways it is determined not only by current ideology, but also by the long-term process of true History. (150)

Marxist literary criticism believes that a writer's social class and its prevailing values have a major role to play on what is written. Authors are not the autonomous individuals whose imagination and genius have created an enduring work but the Marxists as formed by their social contexts see them. Under Marxist criticism society, it becomes an art. According to Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks:

> Marxist criticism prescribes the broad picture of social reality, the novel of sound views, the social document, the party-line mimesis, the blueprint for social planning. And it equally prescribes the personal relation, the individually intricate symbol. (470)

Marxist criticism shows a keen sense of the connection between the inner life .of a man and the social and economic factors that determine their circumstances at a particular time.

Marxist criticism is a specialized branch of sociological criticism for sociological criticism, which examines a work of art in relation to the society in which it is produced and Marxist criticism according to B. Prasad,-"Either relates literature to -its social origins, or accounts for the writer's attitude by his place in the social order, or takes into- consideration his political and economic ideology". (230)

According to Marxist, literary criticism a critic is a member of an intellectual proletariat who promotes Cultural Revolution through a political commitment. The Marxist critics analyze a work of art by making a division between the 'overt' (manifest or surface) and 'covert' (latent or hidden) in the contents of the work. They relate the covert to basic Marxist themes such as struggle or progression of society through various historical states. The Marxist critic applies a method in which the context of the work is related to the social-class of the author. The Marxist critics even relate the literary work to tire social assumptions of the time in which it is consumed. They even practice a method in which they claim that a literary form is determined by political circumstances. The Marxist critic has to grasp the literary work artistically, for in 2 work of high order there is no simple message but a complex vision of things, which is implicit.

The main tenet of Marxist criticism' is that the nature of literature is influenced by the social and political circumstances in which it is produced. The difficulty and controversy lie entirely in deciding-how close- the influence, is one. going, to adopt the 'determinist' position and argue that literature is the passive product of socio- economic forces, or one is going to take a 'liberal' view and consider the socio-economic influence more distant or subtle. Leaving aside these difficulties and controversies, Marxist criticism can be viewed as a good approach to expose the sociological and ideological implications, which are latent in a work of art.

Conclusion :

Thus, one of the main strengths of Marxist criticism is that it gets away from the perception that literary texts express timeless and universal truths regarding life and human nature. It witnesses the criteria, regarding how a text belongs to a certain period. It also discloses how people at that time united and made sense of their world. All these are evident in the essays of the sophisticated and well-known Marxist critics. It is much more common with feminism and is often combined with feminism. Infact, Marxism, Feminism and New. Historicism, all uplift political questions regarding the sense of order expressed in a literary text and how men and women stand in relation to society.

Works Cited

Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Bangalore: Prism Books Pvt. Ltd., 1993.

Barry, Peter. An Introduction to Literary Theory. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Davis, Robert Con. and Ronald Schleifer. Contemporary Literary Criticism. Hound mills: Macmillan Press Ltd. - 1984.

Prasad, B. An Introduction to English-Criticism. New Delhi: Macmillan India Limited, 1998.

Whimsatt, William K. and Brooks Cleanth, Literary Criticism: A Short History. Canada, Random House of Canada, 1957.