

Degree III

English (Hons.)

Paper (V)

Topic- Criticism

New Historicism

New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that a literary work should be studied and interpreted within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era. It examines both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times. It also examines the social sphere in which the author moved, the psychological background of the writer and the books and theories that may have influenced him or her.

The term 'New Historicism' was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. According to Greenblatt, New Historicism was not a theory, but "An array of reading practices that investigate a series of issues that emerge, when critics seek to chart the ways texts, in dialectical fashion, both represents a society's behaviour patterns and perpetuate, shape, or alter that culture's dominant codes."

Major New Historicists include Clifford Geertz, Louis Montrose, Catherine Gallagher, Jonathan Dollimore and Jerome McCann.

Key Texts of New Historicism

- (a) Clifford Geertz: "The Interpretation of Cultures": Selected Essays (1983)
- (b) Dollimore: "Radical ~~Theory~~ Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries" (1984)
- (c) Louis Montrose: "New Historicism": Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies (1992)
- (d) Greenblatt and Gallagher - "Practicing New Historicism" (2000)

Key Term in New Historicism

Discourse :- It is a key term of New Historicism which was widely used by Michel Foucault. He used this term to designate the system of thoughts, ideas and images that encapsulates the concept of culture. Foucault defined Discourse as "Ways of constituting knowledge together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relation in which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. According to Foucault, truth, morality and meaning are created through discourse."

Thick Description :- It is a term used by Clifford Geertz in his 1973 essay "Thick Description" "oward and Interpretive Theory of Culture". Geertz borrowed the term from Gilbert Ryle, a British metaphysical philosopher at the

University of Oxford and used it to describe his own ethnographic method.

Geertz stated that anthropology's task is that of explaining cultures through thick description which specifies many details conceptual structures and ~~is~~ meanings which is opposed to thin description, it is a factual account without any interpretation. Thick Description signified dense description of social life from observation, through which broader cultural interpretations and generalisations can be made.