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## **Nature of Western Literary Discourses Versus Eastern Discourses/ Aestheticism: An Inquiry into Meaning and Method**

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### **Abstract:**

The present research paper explores the differences between Western and Eastern approaches to understand the concept of meaning, reality, existence and truth as these notions are explicated with the fundamental reading, writing and interpretation of literary texts and are the subjects of human quest and academic research from time immemorial. The paper looks into these two diametrically opposite methods to find out or identify what is obtained as a result of reading and research and how human subjectivity is formulated out it. Although the application of Western critical theories is quite fashionable and it cannot at a glance be rejected as far as its applicability to the literary interpretation of literary texts are concerned. The paper aims to delve deep towards the indigenous knowledge system and attempts to frame out discourses which stands entirely opposite to the essence of Western critical theories and consequently offers a new perspective which can be termed emanating from indigenous knowledge system.

**Keywords:** Western and Eastern Literary Discourses, Human Nature, Existence and Indigenous Knowledge System.

“Instead of thinking of our ideas as our own creations, and as working for us, we have to think of them as autonomous selfish memes, working only to get themselves copied”. —Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (1999)

### **Introduction:**

By the late 1980s, something very peculiar transpired to literary theory, as the debate and discussion went around signaling the facts that theory keel overed from its prestigious and dominant position As Jeffry Williams states in his research article “*The Death of Deconstruction, the End of Theory and Other Ominous Rumours*,” “on the theory market” (01)., a kind of academic position it has obtained throughout 1980s to 2010s without serious approaches to dismantle its intrinsic nature and influences that literary theories has formulated among the academic contemplations. By the late 2020s and early 1980s, there were strong articulations proclaiming the death of theory, stating gravely to do away with its inclusion in the interpretation of literary texts. As a catchy article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (1990) Shaw mentions, “Devastating Developments Hastening the Demise of literary theory” (2).and as a recent PMLA article famously pronounces, ‘Literary theory, it appears, is dead in literature departments today’ (Neolan, 1992, 1266). As the narrative goes on, the basic tenets of literary theory hos now superseded by the new historicism (rewriting of history), neo-pragmaticism, cultural studies, lesbigay studies, personal criticism and so on. The academic world has moved on to a new contemplation of thought associated with nativism, naturalism, nationalism, etc.

### **Objectives:**

To examine what precisely occurred to literary theory, this research article maps out a short of literary studies of theory with focus on its nature and approaches. This brief discussion on literary

theory attempts to argue not merely in displaying the purported course of literary theory, but in showing how theory, as the continuation of colonial empire, operates and how theories circulate. It must also state something about the overall state of contemporary criticism and theory since literary theories have held a very dominant role in the foundation of the moment of theory in the corpus of literary theories.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The contemporary academic world is burdened with the implication of literary theory, after the demise of the colonial era, to the interpretation of literary texts. The introduction of post-1980s critical theories is extensively very subtle and disintegrative in their nature and approaches. The discourse of human sciences appears to be in systematic control and is in the intended direction as it seems to be envisaged by the colonial masters. Political, geographically national spaces and geographical boundaries were liberated after the demise of the colonial era and consequently, the emergence of literary theories is well-motivated design to dominate the third world nation and its minds. Although the age of post theory or dead theory is already in fashion in academic discourses all over the world at the grassroots levels and from the spaces of interactions, this just merely sounds superficial and symbolic.

Mark Turner's audacious work *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (1999) was a groundbreaking work for its arguments are based on taking seriously almost the entire corpus of literary theory from critical and indigenous perspectives. Mark Turner says, in his book *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language* (1999) "In the academic zeal to celebrate the new ideas emerging from the fabrics and articulations of literary theories, the third world nations completely turn ignorant to their own indigenous system of knowledge and incepted

to follow blindly whatever was offered to them from their Western masters” (34). Some of the academics from the Western world, such as Max Eastman in his book *The Literary Mind: Its Place in Age of Science* (1931) had explicitly initiated to dismantle ‘the literary mind’ (23) decades earlier and before Turner, well-known literary theorists such as Wolfgang Iser’s *How to Do Theory* (2005) though not exactly applying the term says, “had frequently worked at the confluence of literature and mind and had shed some light on the nature of literary theory and its manipulative aspects (65)”. In this paper, attempts have been made to look into the nature of literary theory and aestheticism to articulate their approaches to meanings and methods.

*The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary’s* (2007) defines the notion of evolution as including “a process of change in a certain direction: unfolding” and “a process of continuous change from a lower, simpler, or worse to a higher, more complex, or better state”, (765) Most dictionaries mention this latter definition and indicate movement towards the direction of serious complexity, sophistication, and refinement; they take for granted the idea that evolution inevitably means progress. Sliding the notion of change for better or worse, the vagueness of the definition ‘change in a certain direction’ (12) however, should not be forgotten. Together, these two definitions may be taken as pointers toward evolution’s warmly contested nature. Obviously, whenever and in whatever contexts a literary theory’s articulation is used to examine a piece of literature, on what sort of basement can we state that one reading, description, or analysis is better, richer, deeper, or more incisive and compelling than another? It is very difficult to observe in relation to such examples where theory becomes practice that any development in literary criticism is being made or that the literary theory from which the reading has been obviously or not so obviously derived is in any particular case a greater source of illumination than other available theories—or, if such a position is possible, no theory at all.

Observing the nature of literary theory, it is very difficult to indicate tangible, quantifiable evidence for alleged improvements. Progress and qualitative inculcation in literary theory, whether within the ambit of particular theories as they come out or within the dominating institution as a whole, remains extremely difficult to judge or measure. No matter how brilliantly we might take a “new” literary theory, we might always ask ourselves: Does the latest theory take us any closer look toward understanding the meaning and nature of the terms literary and literature? May it add to the re-conceptualizing of relations between literature, aesthetics, and ideology? Can it have greater epistemological value and meaning than any of its predecessors in terms of its ability to illuminate our ethical, medical, environmental, psychological, or even spiritual concerns?

It is accurately the difficulty of even optionally identifying signs of progress in literary theory that makes it possible for some thinkers outside literary studies, some perhaps even completely incognizant of literary theory’s existence, to produce awe-inspiring writing about literature. The outsider equipped with little or no knowledge of literary theory, the neophyte graduate student entering a doctoral program, whether it be at the University of California–Irvine in the United States, the University of Cardiff in the United Kingdom, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in France, the University of Alexandria in Egypt, or the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, may achieve a theoretical breakthrough surpassing those of senior faculty who have been gainfully employed by literature departments in universities for decades.

Indeed, many more traditionally oriented literary scholars would be quick to scoff at the very idea of improvement in literary theory. Many of them can hardly believe in, let alone get excited by, the idea of quantum leaps in literary theory because they take great pride in their own ignorance of literary theory, frequently dismissing current allegedly popular theories as mere fads

and joyfully building careers that they themselves often regard as flourishing in those halcyon days before the so-called fall into theory.

In an anthology aptly named *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature* (1998) literary critic Helen Vendler vividly describes these prelapsarian days;

Though the state of reading, like that of listening to a piece of music, is one of intense attention, it is not one of scholarly or critical reflection. Scholarship, criticism, and theory are suspended, though paradoxically everything we know and are is unreflexively brought to bear; and the hesitations, pleasures, and perplexities we encounter in that state are the material, as we bring them to consciousness, for all subsequent intellectual reflection. (109)

The death of theory narrative plays an extraordinary function, in a meaningful way facilitating a sort of synecdoche for the current transformed discourses in literary studies that have come to be termed under the title of theory. It was not a majority perception or view- there have been many challenging and conflicting theoretical positions in academic discourses, not to articulate the common opposition of conventional scholarship and criticism. Literary theory came to be asserted in for what it is normally called ‘the moment of theory’ or hours or time of theory, that is, the period in which the dominant elite model of critical practice was “Grand Theory” and in general theoretical speculation. That corpus includes the many Theories like Feminism, Marxism, Structuralism, Reader Response, and Psychoanalysis, as well as Deconstruction- that came to the threshold during the 1970s, the theories that have recently been canonized and monumentalized in a host of anthologies and surveys of contemporary criticism, and from the other direction attacked

in the popular press, where the ills of contemporary literature are often blamed on the inclination for deconstructionism.

To conjecture the possibility of the representational sway of literary theory, the moment of theory has been categorized as the epoch of deconstruction, as the time before the 1980s in literary studies is often summarized under the name of ‘New Criticism’. For instance, a recently published book on the history of contemporary criticism, Art Berman’s *From the New Criticism to Deconstruction* (1988) formulates the entire corpus of literary criticism on two aspects; New Criticism and deconstruction, downgrading Marxism and feminism to peripheral parts of the simple turn to poststructuralism. Specifically, the entire corpus structure of the narrative of theory its curve, from its inception in the late 1960s and obtaining significance through the 1970s, and its wane in the 1980s and virtual closing off in the early 1990s- gives a holograph image of the “theory phenomenon”. (14) as Bruce Robbins has termed it. The particulars of that gamut stand as exemplary phenomena in the recorded history of criticism and theory. Its inception in the sixties, radiating its acclivity and its going away from conventional implication of theory; the beginning at the Hopkins conference, which is known as the mythic birthdate of the moment of theory; the establishment of the Yale School, which provides face to the shift in critical practices and literally as well as prominently takes the place of New Criticism, an earlier “Yale School”; and the dispersion of the Yale School, indicated by de Man's death and more tortuously by the discovery of the wartime writings, envisioning the demise of the institutional predominance of theory.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

F.S.C Northrop says in his famous book *The Meaning of East and West: A World Understanding* (1947) that the “Western critical theories have been constantly searching or engaged to outline for



the theoretical components of existence”. (167) – the casual or natural causes for how things happen, what is the cause, how it should be understood? how the effect can be controlled, and how men/the human mind can manipulate nature. And the Eastern mind/ critical theories says Northrop, “has been on entirely different kind of adventure. Here, the search has been to find the aesthetic component of reality – not the theoretical, but the aesthetic”. (168) The medium for this search for meaning is meditation, an aesthetical understanding of the male gaze wherein it reinforces the ideas of the search for self or mother in the process of projecting of gaze and examples from the life of Mahatma Gandhi when he started addressing his own wife as baa which means in Gujarati Maa.

The Eastern mind/ Literary discourse has not been much engaged with the search to know how to manipulate nature, but it has been interested in how to be one with nature – not in how to conquest it, but in how to be in a deep friendship, a deep participation with it. The Western mind/ Literary Discourses have been in a conflict, a struggle; the Eastern mind has been in the mystique, a connecting relationship. I don’t know whether a reader who admires discourses will agree with me or not, but my understanding is that theory is a product of hatred, an unequal relationship, a relationship of hatred with human nature; hence, struggle, fight, conquering, the language of victory.

Aestheticism is a connecting relationship; that is what is proposed also by the theory of integral humanism by Pt Deendayal Upadhyaya, hence, there is no trace of conflict, no struggle in its contents. In another way, the theory is based on male attitude and Aestheticism on a female attitude. The theory is aggressive (Content of theory and imposition), and Aestheticism is receptive. The Eastern mind is more Aestheticism. Or, if you allow me, I will say that wherever an aesthetic mind is, it is Eastern. The scientific/ Theoretical mind is Western. It makes no

difference whether a man is born in the East or the West. I am using East and West as two attitudes, two approaches, not as two geographical denominations. You can be born in the West, but you may not belong there; you may be Eastern through and through. You may be born in the East, but you may not belong; you may be scientific, and the approach may be mathematical, and intellectual.

Tantra is absolutely Eastern. It is a way of participating with reality – a way to be one with it, how to dissolve boundaries, how to move in an undifferentiated realm. Theory differentiates and creates boundaries, and definitions because theory cannot work without definitions, without boundaries. The more clear-cut the boundaries, the better the possibility for the theory to work. So, Theory cuts, divides, and chops everything. Aestheticism is a dissolving of boundaries in order to move to the undifferentiated where there is no definition, where there is no limit to anything, where everything moves into everything else, where everything is everything else. You cannot cut, you cannot chop existence. The consequences are bound to be very different in each approach. By the theoretical approach, by dividing, and chopping, you can come only to dead particles, and atoms, because life is something that cannot be cut into divisions. And the moment you cut it, it is no more there.

We cannot study ourselves by studying our parts. we are not just a total of parts, we are more than that. When you divide cut and analyze, life disappears; only dead parts are left. That is why theory will never be capable of knowing what life is. Whatsoever is known through theory will be about death – matter – it will never be about life. Theory may become capable of manipulating life, but still, *life* is not known, not even touched. Life remains a question for theory. By the very method of its technology, its methodology, and by the very approach, life cannot be known through it.

That is why theory goes on denying – denying anything else other than matter. The very approach debars any contact with that which is life. And the vice versa happens also: if you move deeply into religion, you will start denying matters. Shankara says that matter is an illusion, it is not there; it simply appears to be. The whole Eastern approach has been to deny the world, matter, or anything material. Why? The theory goes on denying life, the divine, consciousness. Deeper religious experiences go on denying matter – all that material. Why? Because of the very approach. If you look at life without differentiation, matter disappears. Matters are life divided, differentiated. Matter means life defined and analyzed into parts.

So, of course, if you look at life undifferentiated and become part of it, in deep participation, if you become one with existence as two lovers become one, matter disappears. That is why Shankara says that matter is an illusion. If you participate in existence, it is. But Karl Marx says that consciousness is just a by-product, it is not substantial; it is just a function of matter. If you divide life, then consciousness disappears and becomes illusory. Then the only matter is. What I am intending to say to you is this existence is one. If you approach it through analysis, it appears as life, as divide, as consciousness. If you approach it through science there is no possibility of any deep bliss happening to you, because with dead matter bliss is impossible. At the moment it can only be illusory. Only with a deep participation is bliss possible.

Tantra is an assimilating technique. The effort is to make you one with existence. So, we will have to lose many things before you can enter. we will have to lose our habitual pattern of analyzing things; we will have to lose the deep-rooted attitude of fighting, of thinking in terms of conquering. When Hillary reached to the highest peak of the Himalayas, Mount Everest, all of the Western world reported it as a conquering – a conquering of Everest. Only in a Zen monastery in Japan, on a wall newspaper, it was written, “Everest has been befriended” – not conquered! This

is the difference - “Everest has been befriended”, now humanity has become friendly with it. Everest has allowed Hillary to come to it. It was not a conquering. The very word *conquer* is vulgar, and violent. To think in terms of conquering shows aggressiveness. Everest has received Hillary, welcomed him, and now humanity has become friendly; now the chasm is bridged. Now we are not unacquainted. One of us has been received by Everest. Now Everest has become part of human consciousness. This is bridging.

Then the whole thing becomes totally different. It depends on how you look at it. Remember this before we enter the techniques. Remember this: Tantra is a love effort toward existence. That is why so much sex has been used by Tantra: because it is a love technique. It may not only be love between man and woman; it is a love between you and existence, and for the first time existence becomes meaningful to you through a woman. If you are a woman, then existence becomes for the first time meaningful to you through a man. That is why sex has become so much discussed and used by Tantra. Think of yourself as absolutely asexual – as if all sex were removed from you the day you were born. You will be unable to love; you will be unable to feel any affinity with anyone. It will be difficult to get out of yourself. You will remain enclosed, you will not be able to approach to go out to meet someone. They’re in existence, you will be a dead thing, closed from everywhere.

Sex is your effort to reach out. You move from yourself; someone else becomes the centre. You leave your ego behind; you go away from it to meet someone. If you really want to meet you will have to have to surrender, and if the other also wants to meet you he will also have to move out. Look at the miracle in love – at what happens. You move to the other and the other moves to you. He comes into you and you go into him or into her. You have changed places. Now he becomes your soul and you become her soul or his soul. This is a participation. Now you are

meeting. Now you have become a circle. This is the first meeting where you are not enclosed in the ego. This meeting can become just a stepping stone toward a greater meeting with the universe, with existence, with reality. Tantra is based not on intellect, but on heart. It is not an intellectual effort; it is a feeling effort. Remember this, because that will help you to understand the techniques. Now we will enter the techniques.

### **Conclusion: Summary of Findings**

To arrive at some common conjectural and speculative conclusion, the academic gossip of the death of theory and of the moment of theory can be proposed with the following interconnected effects, which at the most basic level refer to how theories are circulated and practised in literary discourses, how models of theory and Eastern aesthetical criticism enter the literary scene and display for the critical discourse.

First, the pragmatic utility of theory, wherein the theoretical formulation is motivated or orientated towards the accumulation of wealth smeared with movement and career in terms of bodies of propositions displaying humanistic values and truth-based institutional outfits. In another way, it can be stated that theory does not function by logical protocols, but is instrumentalized by the forces of other courses, here in especially by the convention of narrative representation. To argue with any particular theory is generally associated with the temperaments of a generation coterminous with finite career. Consequently, the history of ideas is formulated in the series of great thinkers who in turn animate history, rewriting and articulating in a full narrative form wherein the old is dead and from its rubric a new birth takes place.

As a dominant feature, this is not to state that theory functions as an empty term in the critical economy of thoughts; the case of theory is abstruse and there may be a number of unsaid

reasons why theory climbed so high on the academic scene, ‘not the least of which was its methodological assimilation to the established mode of close reading and its ready applicability to specifically literary texts’ (82) as William Cain points out in *The Crisis in Criticism*. However, my intention here is to dismantle some of the strands of what one might call the underground economy that values and devalues theory futures and to explore the possibility of implementation of endogenous knowledge systems.

Second, the foundational ideology of the theory market proclaims that theories circulate to prompt “original” or “new” work in the humanities and social sciences. Theory theories were once new, cutting-edge, and avant-garde but with the emergence of nativistic discourse, they no longer hold the same academic weight and function. This in turn mandates a periodic and constant reconfiguration of theory, of new or recombinant theories and methodologies, as well as new objects of analysis.

Significantly, the freshness of theory frequently also ties coterminously with consumerist ethos, wherein drastic transformation in criticism and critical theory, especially since the 1960s, incite ever-newer products in criticism. I think that this is high time to revisit Indigenous resources of knowledge system and to unearth it from new perspectives. The application of Western exported literary theories should be used with self-oriented consciousness and should always be contextualized according to indigenous mode of discourses. The very approach of these critical theories is oriented toward countering and as an outcome, it is contaminating the mind and self of the indigenous communities.

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