

## CONGENIALITY OF PSYCHO-LITERARY STUDIES

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### Abstract

*Literature in English has evolved incessantly over centuries. From the middle ages to the post modern age literature has harbored creative and critical thinking. Literary texts have been analyzed in various ways giving rise to various critical genres such as structuralism, deconstruction, and formalism. The literary texts, post deconstruction, have been bestowed with the capability to produce multiple meanings. Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis has enabled understanding of the literary texts with a focus on the unconscious and the psyche. Lacan, in his work, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, mentions, "The unconscious is structured like a language" (20). The unconscious desires that are repressed are expressed in socially acceptable ways such as literary writings and other art forms. This paper studies the process of the conjunction of literature and psychoanalysis. The area that studies literary texts with a keen psychological perspective is termed as "Psycho-literary studies". It is an emerging and developing discipline in literature with ample scope for research. This discipline focuses on the analysis of the psychic structure, as well as an analysis of the id, ego and superego. Moreover, the paper of the female psyche with a female perspective is a less explored area. This study emphasizes the need to study the female unconscious and their repressed psyche through select female authored texts.*

**Keywords:** *Psycho-literary Studies, Psychoanalysis, Female Psyche, Desires*

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### Introduction

Literature in English has progressed incessantly over centuries. One of the significant developments in Literature involves the understanding of the literary text through the development and application of literary and cultural theory. Literary and cultural theory has enabled application of innumerable strategies to the understanding and interpretation of any literary work. Pramod Nayar, an Indian literary critic, defines theory, literary theory and cultural theory in the work, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Nayar stated that theory “destabilizes authority over interpretation....Theory is a way of seeing how meaning emerges in any cultural practice whether film or fiction, architecture or fashion” (ix-x). He further specifies the function of literary theory. He states that a literary theory is a strategy that allows “organized, systematized analysis of literary texts, the institution of Literature (with L in upper case) and reflection of the interpretative strategies ‘applied’ to the texts”(ix-x). Hence, any literary theory analyses a given text for its portrayal of characters, the age of writing, the author’s background, the socio-political-economic scenario at the time of writing, and such other contexts. Literary theory enables a multi-dimensional and contextualized analysis of a given text. For the critical and literary theorists, every word in the text becomes symbolic. Structuralist school of thought started this trend of analyzing a literary text as a signifying system.

### Analysis and Discussion

Henry Lowenfeld (1983), in his essay titled, “Psychic Trauma in the Artist”, states, ‘Frustration is the source of artist’s fantasy....artistic expression is the sublimation of this eternal, inner longing’ (63-64). Any form of art, be it literature, architecture, painting or a musical composition is inspired by a muse. The elements from the society or the significant ‘Others’ play the role of the muse for the creation of any art form. Most often, any piece of work is the result of the

individual's frustration, pain, struggle or pangs of labor. Pain, struggle, frustration are the aftermath of desires. Desires, when unfulfilled, create a sense of frustration in an individual. The Austrian psychologist, Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis studies individual behavior, their desires and the psyche. Unfulfilled desires, the eternal longing, and the consequent anxiety or frustration are the basic ideas surrounding the theory of Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a personality theory propounded by Sigmund Freud, the father of Psychoanalysis. This has further allowed the genesis of psycholiterary studies as a literary genre. Psychoanalytic study helps to understand the human personality and abnormal behavior. Accordingly, human behavior is studied contextualizing all the psychic forces that lie deep within one's mind. Behavior, for the psychoanalysts, is determined by the individual desires or motives. Desires, more specifically the unfulfilled ones, are the focus point of study for the psychoanalysts.

The Psyche, according to Freud is the mind. The term 'Psyche' is a Greek word. Freud, in his psychoanalytic theory, fabricated the structural division of the psyche. This structural division of the mind includes the id, ego and super ego. The id demands immediate gratification of all its desires and works on the pleasure principle. The ego is based on the reality principle and acts according to the norms of the society. The super ego is the conscience that monitors the activities of ego and it blossoms with the socialization process in the child. Everything that is libidinal, instinctual, dynamic, irrational is Id. On the other hand, the Super Ego is the seat of self control, and rational will. Michael Washburn (1988), a modern psychologist, restates Freud's ideas as he writes, while the Id and the Super Ego are in constant conflict with each other, the Ego builds a balance between the two conflicting sources (14-16). Washburn (1988), in the text, *The Ego and The Dynamic Ground – A Transpersonal Theory of Human Development*, Washburn, proposes that the 'Psyche' is made up of two opposite poles: The Egoic pole and the Non-Egoic pole. The Non-Egoic pole is made up of the libidinal energy. It is instinctual, dynamic, affective and biophysical. The Egoic pole is on the other end of the non Egoic pole. The Egoic pole is known for self control and deliberate will. It is logical, linear and rational. This bipolar structure can be equated to Freud's structural model of the Id-Ego-Superego, where the non-egoic pole is equated to the Id and the Egoic pole is equated to the Ego. Carl Jung (1948), the Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist, believed that the Psyche is not a unified single entity. He called it as a 'divided whole' (582). He believed that the human psyche is made up of several

separate parts that are interconnected, yet they are 'relatively independent, so much so that certain parts of the psyche never become associated with the ego at all, or very rarely' (582).

The intra-psychoic split between the id, ego and the super-ego prevails permanently within the psyche. The ego, according to Jung is the 'Persona' or the face that deals with the reality. The reality is subjected to rewards and punishments based on the acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. Thus, the ego pushes the unacceptable id desires deep into the psyche from the fear of punishments. The psyche (mind) is divided into two parts: conscious or unconscious. The conscious part of the psyche is associated with the ego. It is correlated to the bodily states of consciousness. Alan Hobson (2007), in his essay "Normal and Abnormal States of Consciousness", explains that consciousness is to 'operate in a remarkably unified fashion to mediate our experience of the world, our bodies, and ourselves' (112). The deeper part of the psyche that contains all the forbidden id desires, the unpleasant thoughts, the unacceptable wishes is called the unconscious. Carl Jung (1934) calls this deeper part of the psyche as collective unconscious. Further, he names the forbidden desires as Complexes. Jung claims that these Complexes 'can be suppressed with an effort of will, but not argued out of existence' (201). When the unfulfilled desires or unacceptable wishes are pushed into the unconscious by the Ego, the process is termed as repression. Anna Freud has explained this process as one of the defense mechanisms resorted by the ego (175). The unconscious is also the result of repression. Repression induces frustration and anxiety in the individual regarding the unfulfillment of the desires. With regard to repression of the Id's desires, Dollard et al, in their work *Frustration and Aggression*, have stated that, '...these reactions may be temporarily compressed, delayed, disguised, or otherwise deflected from their immediate and logical goal, they are not destroyed' (1-2). The repressed desires prevail in the unconscious permanently until they are expressed.

Frustration regarding unfulfilled desires can lead to conflict within the psyche. These desires, hence, require expression. Individuals resort to expression of the repressed desires by constructing their own imaginary world. Most of the art forms are the result of repression according to psychoanalytic theory. The intra-psychoic conflict needs to be resolved by the ego. The ego defends the Id by expressing the id desires in a socially acceptable way through the act of sublimation. Anna Freud (1992) has explained this act of sublimation in her work *The Ego and Mechanism of Defense*. Sublimation she states helps in 'diverting the instinctual impulses

from their purely sexual goal to aims which society holds to be higher' (175). Psycho-literary studies analyses the literary texts in the light of repressed desires, the intra-psychic conflict and other related psychic phenomena.

The process of repression is predominant in the female than in the male. The patriarchal power represses most of the desires of the female psyche. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, explains the idea of Symbolic Order in his psycho-sexual stages of development. Symbolic Order opens the doors of the infant into the world of language and also creates an intra-psychic conflict. But this conflict between the nature and culture is more complicated for the female psyche. The socialization process and the introduction to language are more rigorous with the female gender. The female psyche is constantly bombarded by the societal forces around her. She is always taught that she 'lacks' something which the male child has. The female is further trained to rise up to the standards set by the male patriarchy. This feeling of inferiority or a lack creates a never ending desire in the female psyche to attain the unattainable. Karen Horney (2015), a feminist psychoanalyst, comments about the exertion of patriarchal power over the female psyche and states that 'A girl is exposed from birth onwards to the suggestion – inevitable whether conveyed brutally or delicately- of her inferiority, an experience which must constantly stimulate her masculinity complex' (119). The female psyche, therefore, establishes an identity which is constantly overpowered by a feeling of lack and is also constantly directed by the societal norms. Morwenna Griffith (1995), in her work, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* discusses the idea of "Constructing Ourselves". The female psyche requires a more closer analysis than the male psyche owing to the domination by the patriarchy and the constant repression they encounter. After being initiated into the Symbolic Order, the female psyche develops a 'desire for the object of Other's desire' as quoted by Lacan (1966) in the work, *Ecrits* (114). The female psyche is doubly repressed. This double repression can only heighten the frustration and anxiety in the female. Psycho-literary studies, which has a special focus on the analysis of the psyche, requires to develop a keener eye to analyze the female psyche and their behavior.

The genesis of psychoanalysis led to the emergence of Psycho-literary studies as a genre in literary and cultural theory. This theory provides scope for an analysis of literary texts by application of psychoanalytical theory. Accordingly, behavior of the author and the characters

are studied with a keen eye for the behavioral motives, unfulfilled desires, and repression. But the feminism in psychology has been a new move. The female experience in psychology too has been less explored. Judith Worell (2000), a clinical psychologist and a feminist theorist, in her work, "Feminism in Psychology: Revolution or Evolution", explains that the theories in the field of psychology reflected a 'male model of reality' (185). The female voices and female centered theories need to be explored to analyze the female voice echoed in the literary texts. Thus, the field of psycho-literary studies too has ample scope for the analysis of the female psyche with a female perspective.

### Conclusion

The unconscious allows investigating into the behavioral aspects of the individual. The unconscious has immense potential for revelation of the behavioral motives. Psychoanalysis, with its focus on the unconscious, has brought out a 'radical semantic change' to the signifying practice according to Nicolas Anderson (1979). The female unconscious is an area that is less explored by literary critics. The emergence of feminism in psychology has allowed more scope for studying this female unconscious as well as the female experience. Psycho-literary studies provides further scope for the study of female psyche, female desires, their repression and other such psychic phenomena.

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