Amalgamation of Literary and Cultural Studies: Recent Development in the Field of Literary Research

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Abstract
Research methodology has been an arbitrary and volatile process through the ages. Trends in research have continuously changed and evolved with the changing scenario in education. Literature has been always been seen as a mirror of society that reflects the realities and nuances of the human existence. In the recent years, literary studies have been looked at in synonymity to cultural studies. Being controversial, two opposing points of views- one of the traditionalists and the other of the proponents of the cultural studies have often led to irreconcilable and polemical arguments. Despite the disagreements, a new interdisciplinary approach called the “Cultural studies” has already taken its place in the field of research and literary studies.

There are many different theoretical approaches, methods and models within contemporary literary and cultural theory (A.Nünning 2004) that indicate which kind of literary studies one is actually talking about if one intends to defend, criticize or reform them. If one looks at the multiplicity of approaches, it becomes clear that for one thing, some approaches are more useful for a cultural orientation of literary studies than others. This roughly drawn outline of the key concepts, objects of study and methods of culturally oriented literary studies is not to be understood as a definitive and binding roadmap which will solve the current crisis of the national philology. Rather, it should be seen as a signpost that points to one possible direction a productive development of literary studies can take.

The plea for culturally oriented literary studies has served its purpose if it makes some contribution to the ongoing debates about the relationship between literary and cultural studies, if it helps to remind the debaters of the fact that concepts and outlines are always constructs; that there is a multiplicity of theories, models and methods which need to be considered; that theoretical approaches, key concepts and methods that constitute our institutional practices should be made explicit.

Keywords: Amalgamation, Cultural Studies, Literary Theory, Literature, Research methodology.

Introduction
Research methodology has been continuously evolving and changing with the changing scenario in education. Literature is a reflection of society, projecting the nuances and realities of human existence. In recent times, literary studies have been closely associated with cultural studies and this association has sparked a debate among traditionalists and proponents of cultural studies. This study aims to discuss recent developments in the field of literary research, specifically the amalgamation of literary and cultural studies.

Literary and Cultural Studies
The term ‘cultural studies’ refers to an interdisciplinary field of research that aims to analyze cultural practices and meanings from multiple perspectives. Cultural studies emerged as a response to traditional modes of literary studies that were viewed as overly focused on the analysis of literary works alone. Cultural studies incorporate a range of theoretical approaches such as Marxism, postmodernism, feminism, and post-colonialism to name a few.

Contemporary literary and cultural theories encompass a variety of methods and models. Some models are more useful for a culturally-oriented approach to literary studies than others. The key concepts, objects of study, and methods of culturally-oriented literary studies can be broadly categorized into four themes: the social context of literature, the reader, textuality, and intertextuality. These themes provide a foundation for understanding how literature is shaped by, and in turn shapes, culture. According to Aoudjit, “In 1983, Terry Eagleton, previously Professor of English Literature at Oxford University and now Professor of Cultural Theory at the University of Manchester, argued in his highly popular and influential Literary Theory: An Introduction, that no work of literature and no literary theory are genuinely apolitical. He wrote that what counts as literature and good taste ‘only serves the ruling power-interests of society at large’” (Aoudjit 2006). Thus, according to Eagleton, English as a discipline of research became significant in the early 20th century in order to incorporate middle classes into “unity with the ruling aristocracy,” and “to diffuse polite social manners, habits of ‘correct’ taste and common cultural standards” (Eagleton 2003).

Challenges and Opportunities
The integration of literary and cultural studies is not free from challenges. Traditionalists argue that cultural studies dilute the focus on the literary work and its intrinsic value. Furthermore, there are challenges in developing interdisciplinary research methodologies that may require a shared understanding of the key concepts and methods used in different disciplines. Despite these challenges, culturally-oriented literary studies offer numerous opportunities. For instance, they help researchers to understand how literature is shaped by cultural practices and ideologies. This can help to broaden the scope of literary studies,
making it more relevant to our contemporary society. Additionally, cultural studies provide a platform for interdisciplinary research that can unquestionably enhance the quality and rigor of research.

In the recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the interdisciplinary approach to literary studies. This has led to the amalgamation of literary and cultural studies that aims to study literature in the context of the culture and society in which it was produced. This approach has substantially helped to bridge the gap between traditional literary studies and the study of culture and society and has opened up new avenues for research.

Another recent development in the field of literary research is the increased use of digital technologies for research and analysis. Digital humanities have emerged as a new field of research, which uses digital tools to study literature and culture. This has facilitated researchers to conduct large-scale studies and analyze texts in new ways, such as through text mining and corpus analysis. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in the study of marginalized voices in literature such as those of women, LGBTQ+ individuals and people of different races and colours. This has further led to the development of new critical approaches, such as feminist and postcolonial criticism that seek to highlight the voices and experiences of these groups in literature.

Finally, there has been a shift towards a more global approach to literary research that intends to understand literature in its global context. This has led to the development of new fields of study, such as world literature and comparative literature, which aim to study literature across cultures and languages. These recent developments in literary research have helped to broaden the scope of literary studies and to bring new perspectives to the field.

Recent developments

1. Digital Humanities: The use of digital tools and technologies has revolutionized literary research. Researchers are now successfully studying literature through text-mining, data visualization, and other computational methods. For example, the “NovelITM” project at McGill University, Canada uses text-mining and network analysis to study the evolution of the novel.

2. Postcolonial Studies: This field of literary research emerged in the 1970s and has gained momentum in the last decades. Postcolonial studies examine the cultural, social, and political effects of colonialism and imperialism, particularly in the Global South. For example, the works of authors like Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy have been studied extensively through a postcolonial lens.

3. Ecocriticism is a relatively new field that explores the relationship between literature and environment. Ecocritics examine how literature represents nature and the natural world and how it contributes to our understanding of environmental issues. For example, the works of authors like Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson and Wendell Berry have been studied through an ecocritical lens.

4. Intersectionality is a concept that recognizes ways in which different social identities intersect and interact with each other. In literary research, intersectionality has been used to examine how issues like race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect in literature. For example, writings of authors like Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison and James Baldwin have been studied through an intersectional lens.

Several literary theorists have contributed to recent trends in literary research through their innovative approaches, fresh perspectives and challenging theories. The most prominent among them are:

1. Judith Butler is known for her work in gender and queer theory. She has explored ways in which language and performance shape identity and subjectivity (Butler 1990).

2. Homi Bhabha’s work in postcolonial theory has emphasized the complexities of cultural hybridity and ways in which power operates through discursive practices (Bhabha 1994).

3. Michel Foucault’s theories of power and knowledge have been influential in literary studies specifically in the analysis of how institutions and cultural practices shape our understanding of the world (Foucault 1969).

4. Roland Barthes’ work in semiotics has been foundational to the study of how meaning is constructed through signs and symbols in literature and other cultural forms (Barthes 1967).

5. Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism has been influential in postcolonial studies, emphasizing the ways in which Western representations of the “East” have contributed to imperialist power dynamics (Said 1978). There are several other theorists who have contributed to recent trends in literary research, such as Donna Haraway, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 1988), Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1967) and more.

Conclusion

The field of literary research has undergone significant changes and developments in recent years. The emergence of cultural studies as an interdisciplinary approach has led to a shift in focus towards understanding the cultural and social contexts that shape literary works. The amalgamation of literary and cultural studies has opened up new avenues for research, interpretation, and analysis of literature. By considering the social and cultural dimensions of literary works, scholars can gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of human experience. While there are still debates and disagreements about the most effective methods and approaches in literary research, the focus on cultural and social contexts has broadened the scope and relevance of literary studies in contemporary society.

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