

## The Concept of Interdisciplinarity and its Relevance to Literary Studies: An Analysis

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**ABSTRACT:** Interdisciplinary approach has become essential to modern methodological literary studies. The concept refers to the amalgamation of perspectives, theories, and methods from various academic disciplines, in order to gain a deep understanding of complex cultural and intellectual phenomena. In the context of Indian literature with its long and sundry tradition, interdisciplinary plays a noteworthy role because literary texts in India often engage with religion, sociology, philosophy, history and cultural studies. Indian literary tradition from classical Sanskrit Literature texts like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* to modern Indian writing in English has shaped the development of Indian literary theory the article evaluates Indian literature through an interdisciplinary lens and discusses various eminent critics, their theories, and their references to other subjects. Finally, the article defines and contextualizes the interdisciplinary approach. It also examines how literature has been interpreted since New Criticism held center stage in the 1940s, providing examples of Indian literature in conformity with interdisciplinary.

**KEYWORDS:** interdisciplinary, literary studies, cultural, intellectual, amalgamation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English literature is a subject, much like Hindi or French literature. However, literary criticism, in Anglo-American or Indian poetics-is considered a discipline. Similarly, linguistics is a discipline. While Natural Science is a discipline, Physics and Chemistry are its subjects. This article examines key terms such as 'Subject' and 'Discipline' and how they are employed in literary criticism, reviewing the work of critics like John Crowe Ransom, Richard Hoggart, and Jacques Derrida and many others we can see how the rise of New Criticism in the 1940s did more than just introduce a new theory, it transformed the intellectual foundations of English studies, establishing meticulous, indepth analysis for analyzing literary genius. In other words, a discipline contains several subjects. An Interdisciplinary approach seeks to coordinate different disciplinary and interpret literature in that light. Indian literature represents one of the richest and diverse literary traditions around the world; it includes works in various languages, regions and cultural histories. However, in recent decades, scholars have progressively adopted interdisciplinary approaches to understand literature within cultural and intellectual frameworks. Traditionally focused on textual analysis and aesthetic treasuring now combine perspectives from multiple academic fields to interpret literary texts more effectively. Now interdisciplinary refers to the integration of knowledge and methodology from various academic disciplines to address complex questions. Interdisciplinary approaches help scholars explore literature in relation to broadened cultural, historical and social context.

### 2. DISCUSSION

Interdisciplinary is an umbrella term for multiple disciplines being brought together in an integrated way. In *Image-Music-Text*, Roland Barthes, says,

"Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins effectively (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down ... in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation" (155).

Joe Moran interprets Barthes position as follows:

"Barthes suggests that interdisciplinarity has the potential to do more than simply bringing the different disciplines together. It can form part of a more general critique of academic specialization as a whole, and of the nature of the university as an institution that cuts itself off from the outside world in small enclaves of expertise. Interdisciplinary approaches often draw attention, either implicitly, to the fact that what is studied and taught within universities is always a political question." Interdisciplinarity (16)

Interdisciplinarity seeks to coordinate different disciplines and interpret literature in that light. Intertextuality runs parallel to interdisciplinarity in trying to show how one text is either embedded or foregrounded in another text. New critics like John Crowe Ransom wanted English literature to be studied as an autonomous subject. Any reference to other subjects is unacceptable to them. Ransom writes

"It is really atrocious policy for a department to abdicate its own self-respecting identity. The department of English is charged with the understanding and the communication of literature, an art, yet it has usually forgotten to inquire into the peculiar constitution and structure of its product. English might almost as well announce that it does not regard itself as entirely autonomous, but as a branch of the department of history, with the option of declaring itself occasionally a branch of the department of ethics" (335).

To Richard Hoggart, English being a subject does not fully cohere with any single discipline. He writes "Sometimes I think there is no recognizable discipline of 'English', no genuine whole, but only a set of contrived frontiers and selected approaches which, for complicated historical and cultural reasons, have come to be known as 'a subject'. Thousands are living within this frame of reference: it is part of the self-justifying, self-perpetuating, closed world of 'English studies'; and it has its counterparts among the other humanities" (125).

If for the New Critics of the 1940s, the text has a core and ought to be autonomous, for the structuralists the use of language in literature is vital for the understanding of the text. For Roland Barthes the text – whether readerly text or writerly text is the subject of study. The Interdisciplinarity creates its own text which is the subject of its study. He writes

"Interdisciplinary studies do not merely confront already constituted disciplines it is not enough to take a 'subject' (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinary study consists in creating a new object, which belongs to no one. The Text is, I believe one such object" (72).

Jacques Derrida brought literature and social sciences under one umbrella by coining the term "Human Sciences." In doing so, he denied the autonomy of literature as a standalone subject. Psychology and other social sciences are now considered aids for interpreting literature; consequently, literature has lost its insularity. When ideas are borrowed from other disciplines, such as the social sciences, to interpret literature, the results can be seen as problematic. As Shoshana Felman writes:

"While literature is considered as a body of language – to be interpreted – psychoanalysis is considered as a body of knowledge, whose competence is called upon to interpret" (5).

With the advent of Feminism, Marxism, New Historicism, Post-colonialism, literature came to be interpreted not as literature per se, but as products of society, ideology and various other factors. Joe Moran makes an interesting point in the following lines

"Research conducted within English departments, meanwhile, ranges across literature, cultural history, cultural studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics, sociology, art history, linguistics, the philosophy of science and many other areas. There may even be people working within such departments who rarely or never study 'literature' as it is commonly understood" (186).

The last quoted sentence justifies Harold Bloom's stand when he dedicated his *The Western Canon* not "to the academics, because small remnant of them reads". What an irony of the situation.

What does interdisciplinarity seek to do? Eco-criticism seems to be an answer because it bridges the gap between the natural sciences and the humanities (should we say human sciences) together. As Joe Moran rightly puts it

"Ecocriticism's project of bringing the humanities and the natural sciences together find a parallel in the growing influence of neo-Darwinian thought over the last few decades. This can be seen in the popular success of books such as Edward O. Wilson's *On Human Nature* (1978) and Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976) and *The Blind Watchmaker* (1985), which see the gene as the basic unit of evolutionary development. Scientists like Wilson and Dawkins are distinct from ecocritics, however, in that they retain a faith in the possibility of ultimate explanation, a theory of everything which will unite the different fields of knowledge. To Hamlet's caution that "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in our philosophy", Dawkins' response as scientist is: 'Yes, but we're working on it.' (Dawkins 1999) In particular, the interdisciplinary project of these writers is founded on a belief that all the cultural product of humanity, including literature, have a biological, genetic base" (177).

As Darwin has rightly observed that, "each species had not been independently created but had descended like varieties from other species" (5). This is true of literary texts. Each text has its tissues in another text, which we rightly call intertextuality. No text can fully be appreciated without referring to another text, New Critics have glossed over this fact.

Joe Moran probes into this area of study, the issue becomes crystal clear

"Some of the new insights of cultural geography and the natural sciences come together with the humanities disciplines in the field of ecocriticism. Broadly speaking, ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and other forms of culture and the natural world, often combining this with a commitment to raising awareness about environmental issues. It has a dual agenda: on the one hand, it deals with 'natural' phenomena that are normally the province of geography and biology and show them to be the product of cultural and historical forces, inflected with meaning and metaphor; on the other hand, it examines the ways in which culture affects a separation from nature, producing hierarchical distinctions between the human and non-human" (170-171).

Ecocriticism challenges these divisions between matter and mind, nature and culture, and between natural sciences (such as biology and geology) and humanities subjects (such as literary criticism, cultural studies and cultural history). One way in which it seeks to do this is by showing the science's understanding of nature is always culturally produced (173).

Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* serves as a concrete example of how new geographical territories stand opposed to one another and represent diametrically opposite values. Ironically both the city and the country are also inter-connected by the impact of industrialization. Similarly, Glocalization, portmanteau word of globalization and localization, marks the export and import of culture from the countryside to the city, even beyond one's own country.

Poets bring in nature and explain the human condition, as Keats has done by comparing four seasons of a year to the four stages of human life. Between nature and man, there is a difference of order but the perception is the measurement of life (i.e, human) and that of nature (non-human). When life is juxtaposed against nature, we find an answer to the bravery of it.

Shiv K. Kumar's *Genesis* poems six in number, run counter to Darwin's theory of evolution and lays emphasis on creation myth according to Christian theory believes. They believe that God has created man but thrown him out of the Garden of Eden along with his wife. The six poems ("Birth of Adam", "Birth of Eve", "Serpent to Eve", "Adam to Eve", "Eve to Adam" and "After the Departure of Adam and Eve from Eden") reinforce the creation myth and our belief of it. Creation leads to sexuality as Adam puts it:

"Forged out of dust, doomed to encounter  
contraries, now I know that a multiply  
is to seek confluence. With another tributary,  
that to replenish the earth is to first ravage it  
that to have dominion over my woman."  
(Trapfalls in the Sky pp 74-75)

"Eve reciprocates Adam by expressing her urge for union.  
And now this wanton urge  
to bite the apples  
off each other's breads."

(Trapfalls in the Sky pp 76)

Creation leads to procreation as nature gains control of the human body. Two disciplines – nature (science, more precisely biology) and humanity (human beings and their sexual urge) are brought together in the course of the poem. As Joe Moran rightly observes:

"Interdisciplinarity could therefore be seen as a way of living with the disciplines more critically and self-consciously, recognizing that their most basic assumptions can always be challenged or reinvigorated by new ways of thinking from elsewhere. Interdisciplinary study represents, above all, a denaturalization of knowledge it means that people working within established modes of thought have to be permanently aware of the intellectual and institutional constraints within which they are working, and open to different ways of structuring and representing their knowledge of the world" (187).

Usually, Interdisciplinary work is constantly changing as people approach it from their respect disciplines and subject. Interdisciplinarity always links different disciplines to produce a startling effort such as when humanity and nature are brought together to explain the human condition as stated above, interdisciplinarity occurs.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Interdisciplinarity has become a key approach in the study of Indian literature. The interdisciplinary nature of literature reflects the complex cultural traditions of our subcontinent. By acquiring these methods, intellectuals can gain a deeper understanding of literary texts and their cultural importance. Interdisciplinary methods broaden the range of literary criticism by blending insights from multiple disciplines. All these approaches contribute to a more panoramic understanding of literature as both an artistic and a cultural phenomenon.

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