



Evolution And Place Of Gothic Fiction In Modern Society

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Abstract:

This article aims to study Gothic Literature, its origin, development, and influence on society in modern times. The genre is controversial in itself because of its irrationality and illogical means of presenting the elements and characteristics. People in the 21st century have been much more inclined toward science and technology. Every theory and concept requires proven logic and rationality to be accepted by the people. Science fiction is getting as much consideration from readers as science has shown its value and importance. So the stories with elements and themes of death, mystery, suspense, the supernatural, omens, curses, fear, and terror seem to be of little or no interest to the people. But still, this genre of literature is witnessing a warm place in the world of fiction, sometimes with more consideration than the other genres of fiction. The themes and elements of the Gothic genre have a very old and deep relationship with human lives, or, in other words, they are as old as time immemorial. The Gothic horror and stories are being presented by TV and cinema. Horror, terror, good, and evil are very common facts, even in modern times. People also prefer to read and get entertainment from stories of horror and terror. An attempt is also being made to study this genre of literature from a cinematic point of view.

Keywords: Cinematic, Gothic, Supernatural, Genre, Logic and Fiction.

Gothic Literature

Gothic fiction also called as Gothic horror. In 20th century, this genre has also been named as Horror fiction. This genre of literature covers the themes of death, decay, destruction, horror, romance, supernatural, grotesque and macabre. The most touching elements of this genre include mystery and fear, omens and curses, nightmares, romance and emotional distress. It is said to derive from Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, later subtitled as *The Gothic Story*. The early and the basic roots of this genre of literature lies in the medieval times. Those were the days when the stories of such characteristics were being presented orally. People used to have belief and faith in such stories. But till Horace Walpole no such writer came up with such idea and elements having Gothic taste and relevance. The Castle of the Otranto is said to be the first Gothic novel. The early precursors of this genre include Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Thomas Beckford and Mathew Lewis etc. It was the second half of the 18th century when this genre emerges as the most accepted genre in the world of literature. After its origin, it came into the hands of romantic writers, who also Paid due consideration

to this genre. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Mary Shelley are the two important writers from the romantic era who introduced the gothic themes to their writings.

The term Gothic refers to a style of architecture popularized during the medieval times. In other common and simpler words we can say that Gothic Fiction or Gothic Literature includes the frightening elements and dark themes such as blood, death, violence, murder, mystery as the basic characteristics of Gothic fiction. Classic Gothic novels gave birth to modern ghost stories and horror novels. The modern reader of the Gothic stories used to get pleasure and entertainment from the writings of the writers who presented their stories having characteristics deep rooted in the dark romanticism. At present times, the classic tales with their settings in the crumbling castles is replaced with urban setting. This can be schools, hotels, hospitals and even the homes. In order to fully appreciate and understand Gothicism in Literature, it's mandatory to understand its place in history and society. It is also equally important to note and understand the factors which lead the writers to choose this genre of literature in their writings.

Development of Gothic Fiction

Gothic literature or Gothic fiction traces its origin in the second half of the 18th century. Gothic fiction stems basically from dark romanticism, which is a more macabre subgenre of Romanticism. The movement was particularly prevalent to English and German literature, but ultimately dominated the whole world. Many notable female authors of Gothic fiction include Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Mary Shelley, the Bronte sisters and even Jane Austen.

Gothic fiction as a genre was first established with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* 1764. The first pioneer of Gothic fiction is said to be Ann Radcliffe, she made her writings such a scare and macabre that she got early recognition to be considered as the professional Gothic writer. Mathew Lewis made his novel *The Monk* 1796 as a thriller to the Gothic fiction. The journey of Gothic fiction was followed by Romantic era.

Romanticism is said to have the characteristics as near to Gothicism. Basically it was Dark Romanticism, a subgenre of romanticism where gothic characteristics and elements are said to have the same characteristic forms. Dark Romanticism also contains the stories where an environment of fear and terror is created. Supernatural elements, curses, omens, death and mystery is shown in the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Mary Shelley. Dark Romanticism is also characterized by expressions of terror, gruesome narratives, supernatural elements and dark and picaresque scenery.

The Victorian era (1837-1901) is said to have produced some of the finest Gothic works. Victorian period is said to be the first industrial and urban period in the history of England. It was the times when the society was trending towards the industrial growth. A shift was made from agrarian society to industrial. Towns and cities were expanding, so was the taste and living standards of the people changing. Work culture was introduced in England.

The scientific discoveries and advancements were on the rise. People were getting more inclined towards science, as science came with rationality and reason. So it was a time, where we are witnessing a complete change in all spheres of life, i.e. social, cultural, moral, religious, educational and political. Novel was the only genre that was used by the writers in their writings. Because novel used to portray the realistic picture of society. Despite presenting the society in general and social issues in particular, novelists like Charles Dickens also produce some of the gothic characteristics in his novels.

Although it was Bram Stoker's thrilling Gothic work *Dracula* 1897, which completely made the public surprise and even terrified them.

Gothic literature was littered with taboo themes such as lunacy and unnatural human nature. Jane Eyre by *Charlotte Bronte* features a madwoman, Rochester's wife, hidden on the third floor of Thornfield hall. Victorian England played a vital role in the creation of Gothic Literature in England. It was a unique point in time, characterized by many elements which found their way into the subversive texts of the time. If it had been for conservative Queen

Victoria's pervasive impact on her subject, and the subsequent utter strangeness of the Victorians- their beliefs and their practices- audiences today would never come to know the terror and thrill of the genre's greatest and most enduring creations and characters.

Gothic Fiction in the Early 20th Century

The modern ghost story developed late in the nineteenth century, which was a sceptical age, in an age of general belief in ghosts and similar spectral manifestations, ghost stories are generally a matter of fact. The ghosts in modern fiction takes any forms, such as the animal ghosts, and may be more active and malevolent than in early Gothic Fiction. The horror tales experienced an upsurge in popularity at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the society was advancing towards modernism, detective fiction and science fiction was getting much recognition by the audiences. But with the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* 1922, in which are transformed into ghosts, it was again proved that the Gothic taste is yet in the society. The Romantic strand of Gothic was taken up in the Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). Gothic fiction continues to be extensively practised by contemporary authors. Many modern writers of horror fiction exhibit considerable Gothic sensibilities, for example Anne Rice, Stella Coulson, Stephen King and Susan Hill etc. After the first half of the twentieth century, Gothic stories were being introduced in the world of TV and cinema. This new version of experiencing the Gothic stories was demanding to the public. The audiences used to experience with their own eyes, the ghosts, the macabre creatures, supernatural elements, crumbling castles, unusual happenings. In Hindi cinema, the Gothic tradition was combined with aspects of Indian culture, particularly with the reincarnation, with the beginning of the film *Mahal* 1949, *Madhumati* 1958. This journey of Gothic stories continued during 70's, 80's and 90's also. So steadily Gothicism became a major source of inspiration for many blockbuster movies, dramas, TV serials and graphic horror novels.

Place and Influence of Gothic Literature in Modern Society

Gothic novels and stories that incorporate horror and romantic elements, supernatural incidents and mystery. Gothic novels allowed the writers and readers to explore the ideas through the medium of storytelling, ghost, death, fear, suspense, mystery curses and omens. All those things provide the ways to explore the fear of unknown and what control we have as humans over those forces.

Modern society is the one, where man needs every logic over the things to get acceptance and recognition. Because of the advancement in science and technology, new innovations and discoveries are taking place. Man seems to be in a state of affairs where he is supposed to make use of his logic, rational, and senses. Science fiction and Detective fiction are being given due consideration, because of the scientific temper of the people. So it seems to be of least or no interest to the people to accept Gothic stories. But we have been witnessing that people from different faiths, beliefs and cultures have their ages old relationship with supernatural beings, deep faith in curses and omens, suspense, mystery and horror. Writers of Gothic fiction of the present day seems to be real masters in their art of presenting their stories to the readers and the audiences of theatre, where readers seem to be helpless in reading the Gothic stories. The environment these present day writers are making is really appreciating. In the Victorian era, many facts that were believed to be true, that had controlled people's lives and opinions, had been proven wrong by scientific discoveries. The idea of good and evil came from bible, although every other confessional faith believes in good and evil. The victory of good over evil always had a place in the minds of people. However during Victorian era, when the evil was presented as a more dominant and stronger force by Gothic writers. So the prevailing idea of good as superior to evil was challenged by Gothic Writers. A sense of fear, terror, horror, psychological disorders was created by the Gothic writers. Evil forces as much stronger and beyond the man's knowledge were presented by the Gothic writers. The journey of Gothic fiction continued till the 20th century without and halt and interruption. As the advancement of science and technology was making the people to believe in logic and rationality, the confessional faith was questioned and challenged by many scholars and scientists of the world. But despite being the scientific temper and culture all over the world, Gothic fiction is still enjoying its prevailing status. The style of presenting the modern Gothic stories is having a little bit change, as the modern setting is not limited to the classic or conventional castles, and buildings only. Now the setting and the place for making the supernatural powers or evil powers to come, can be hospitals, hotels, residential complexes etc. People still believe and enjoy the Gothic stories, people like to be scared and these type of stories allow people to explore a different type of world through their imagination. Readers are made to feel and think beyond their logic, rationale and knowledge. A sense of curiosity is being created by Gothic fiction.

In the twenty first century, Gothic is increasingly hybridised, fear may not be the primary concern or mood of contemporary Gothic narratives- rather comedy, or romance, or macabre quirkiness or melancholia,

or desire, or mourning. In fact, Gothic Has been so thoroughly hybridised with so many different kind of texts that it is difficult to securely pin down any longer. In order to better understand the modern Gothic fiction, one should look into its origin and main tropes, and follow their evolution. Gothic fiction has its roots in Renaissance tragedies, medieval romances, fairy tales, superstitions, mysteries and early experiments in the novel. It was always inspired by the past, being a literary genre of historical recycling. The medieval notions of romance, adventure and chivalry, marvellous incidents and strange tales that re-emerged in the eighteenth century along with their wild elements, natural settings, seeped into the eighteenth century where they were accentuated, and became defining characteristics of Gothic Fiction.

One of the point and condition of Gothic fiction still having its place and acceptability in the modern scientific society is because Gothic genre combines both horror and romance, the modern reader is made to think and search for the forces beyond the logic and imagination. A different type of twist is given to the usual romance stories. Gothic fiction is still popular in contemporary times, because of its appeal to intellectuality, emotions and spirituality.

Gothic Fiction and Cinematic World

Gothic fiction has made its place in the world of cinema and TV. Gothic tradition has left a popular mark upon the cinematic horror genre. The repeatedly adapted and screened tale from Gothic fiction is *Dracula*. The Vampire has fuelled the reader's fascination for the mysterious and supernatural in both cinema and TV. The notions of haunted clowns have exploded lately in popular culture and has become a mainstay of social media. The true themes from Gothic fiction are being revived and applied to new settings and situations. Creepy clowns are another source of our fascination with things that stalk us from the shadows that is both terrifying and thrilling. Gothic films were part of early cinema, adapting Gothic fiction on screen like stage melodramas had previously done. Gothic works that strongly influenced cinema were those from the 19th century.

According to new directions in 21st century *Gothic: The Gothic Compass*, scholars considers the Gothic films *Frankenstein (1931)* by Tod Browning and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1931)* by Rouben Mamoulian , a foundational triptych from which they look back to earlier gothic films and forward to later ones.

Gothic fiction has been a significant source of inspiration for various blockbuster movies and books. These Gothic stories continued to be appropriated by popular culture in new ways. The representation of old castles, the grotesque setting, shadowy images and the evil forces got a warm recognition and acceptance by the modern readers. As we know as the society is, so will be the literature. Because ultimately its readers and the audiences who will decide the fate of the writers. So the writer used to represent the society, its taste, issues and a true mirror. It has been proved by the audience that there is a great need and demand for Gothic fiction in cinemas and TV. Many new concepts and polished ways of presenting the Gothic fiction are coming. Even in Hindi cinema, we are witnessing a big demand for Gothic stories. So it's a mark of evidence and proof that readers and audiences of every age has made their inclinations towards Gothicism.

Conclusion

Gothic fiction emerged in eighteenth century England, has its roots in the medieval period. Dark Romanticism, a subgenre of Romanticism is being considered as closely related to the Gothic fiction. Gothic fiction, makes people afraid, and makes the readers believe in the supernatural beings, the monsters, the ghosts, the vampires, the omens and curses etc. As the society was advancing towards the more scientific progress and development from nineteenth century. Gothic fiction didn't seems to be of less importance in the world of writings. The Victorian era also produced some of the finest Gothic writers. It was an industrial age. A shift was seen in England from agrarian set up to industrial set up. Twentieth century witnessed two major events from World War 1 and World War 2. Chemical weapons, aircrafts, tanks, and other modern war equipment's were being used in the battles and the wars. Anew type of psyche was developed in the minds of the people. The second half of the twentieth century has emerged as more advanced than the previous one. The lifestyles of the people have been changed. A new type of working culture came into use. Population is the rise. Science is progressing more towards making the man's life more comfort and easy. But still, Gothic fiction seems to enjoy its permanent status quo. More thrilling horror came into the writings. Cinema and TV

has introduced Gothic fiction into their presentations. Modern man is blessed with all the desires and accomplishments. But Gothic stories seems to be of more interest to him, as he goes on opening his faculty of mind, and think beyond the imagination.

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