

भारतीय ज्ञान परंपरा

संस्कृति, दर्शन, शैक्षिक विचारधाराएँ और नवाचार

सम्पादक :
डॉ. दिनेश चन्द्र शर्मा

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21. The Architecture of Fear : Gothic Novel

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The second half of the 18th century is popular for the creation and development of the novel. The term "Gothic" originates from Germanic tribes called the 'Goths.' They belonged to the medieval times. They created ornate and intricate style of architecture. This proved to be the ideal backdrop for both the physical and the psychological settings in a new literary style. In some or the other way, the word 'Gothic' is now taken to mean medieval.

These novels are also known as Novels of Terror. The novel of Richardson and Fielding was realistic and didactic. It soon lost its charm and became monotonous. Affected by the Romantic ideals, a new kind of novel emerged known as the Gothic Romance.

Development of the Genre : Gothic literature developed during the Romantic period in Britain. The first mention of "Gothic," as pertaining to literature was in the subtitle of Horace Walpole's 1765 story *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* which, the British Library says, was meant by the author as a subtle joke: "When he used the word it meant something like 'barbarous,' as well as 'deriving from the Middle Ages.'" In the book, it's purported that the story was an ancient one, then recently discovered. But that's just part of the tale. The supernatural elements in the story launched a whole new genre which took off in Europe. Then, America's Edgar Allen Poe got a hold of it in the mid-1800s and succeeded like no one else. In Gothic literature, he found a place to explore psychological trauma, the evils of man, and mental illness. Any modern-day zombie story, detective story, or Stephen King's novels; all of them are indebted to Poe. There may have been successful Gothic writers before and after him, but no one perfected the genre quite like Poe. Horace Walpole set this vogue

with the publication of his novel "The Castle of Otranto; A Gothic Story (1764). It was full of the horrid scenes, haunted castles, skeletons and ghosts and witches. The other novelists who practiced this sort of fiction were Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, Mathew Lewis (Monk) and Miss Clara Reeve.

Gothic fiction actually emerged as a sub genre of Romanticism which was a reaction to the dry rationality of the age of enlightenment (Dryden and Pope) The Romantics focused on the beauty of nature, subjectivity, individualism, and the sublime. Though Gothicism shared many features of Romanticism, it mainly focused on the darker side of humanity and its preoccupation with sin and evil.

Major Gothic Writers : A few of the most influential and popular 18th-century Gothic writers were Horace Walpole (The Castle of Otranto, (1764) is widely recognized as the starting point of the Gothic novel. With its haunted spaces, tragic lineage, and inexplicable events, the novel established key elements that would echo throughout the genre. Subsequent authors such as Ann Radcliffe expanded the form, weaving mystery, psychological suspense, and hints of the supernatural. Unlike horror that aims to shock, the Gothic creates a lingering unease a sense that something is not quite right, even if it cannot be named. 1765), Ann Radcliffe (Mysteries of Udolpho, 1794), Matthew Lewis (The Monk, 1796), and Charles Brockden Brown (Wieland, 1798). The genre continued to command a large readership well into the 19th century.

Initially, Romantic authors such as Sir Walter Scott (The Tapestryed Chamber, 1829) adopted Gothic conventions. Later Victorian writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson (The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 1886) and Bram Stoker (Dracula, 1897) incorporated Gothic motifs in their stories of horror and suspense. Elements of Gothic fiction are prevalent in several of the acknowledged classics of 19th-century literature including Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818) confronted fears of unchecked scientific ambition, while Bram Stoker's Dracula embodied Victorian unease about sexuality, disease, and foreign influence. These stories weren't just about monsters they were mirrors to the anxieties of modern society., Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables (1851), Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre (1847), Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831 in French), and many of the tales written by

Edgar Allan Poe (The Murders in the Rue Morgue, 1841; The Tell-Tale Heart, 1843)

Gothic elements include the following:

1. Setting in a castle. The action takes place in and around an old castle, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The castle often contains secret passages, trap doors, dark rooms, hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. Excepts castles, the setting of the novel might be an isolated church or a remote sheltering or an enchanted wood
2. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense. The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. Often the plot itself is built around a mystery, such as unknown parentage, a disappearance, or some other inexplicable events.
3. Ancient Prophecy: An ancient prophecy is connected with the castle or its inhabitants (either former or present). The prophecy is usually obscure, partial, or confusing.
4. Omens, portents, and visions: A character may have a disturbing dream vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events.
5. Supernatural or other inexplicable events: Dramatic, amazing events occur, such as life. In some works, the events are ultimately given a natural explanation, while in others the ghosts or giants walking, or inanimate objects (such as a suit of armor or painting) coming to events are truly supernatural.
6. High, even overwrought emotion: The narration may be highly sentimental, and the suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom. Crying and emotional speeches are characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror. Characters frequent, breathlessness and panic are common. In the filmed gothic, screaming is common.
7. Women in distress: As an appeal to the pathos and sympathy of the reader, the female characters often face events that leave them fainting, terrified, screaming, and sobbing A lonely, pensive, and oppressed heroine is often the central figure of the novel, so her sufferings get more attention. The women suffer all the more because they are often abandoned, left alone (either on purpose or by accident), and have no protector at times.
8. Claustrophobia: Claustrophobia is an abnormal dread of being

confined in a close or narrow space. Often attributed to actual physical imprisonment or entrapment, claustrophobia can also figure more generally as an indicator of the victim's sense of helplessness or horrified mental awareness of being enmeshed in some dark, inscrutable destiny. If one were to formulate the poetics of space for the Gothic experience, claustrophobia would comprise a key element of that definition.

American Gothic Fiction-

As an offshoot of Romanticism emerged Dark Romanticism, also known as American Gothic. As compared to Romanticism, it was darker, had more emphasis on the supernatural, and a deep fascination with the grotesque and demonic.

Edgar Allan Poe from America skillfully got hold of the Gothic genre. In his hands, Gothic fiction flourished to its extreme. All the works of Edgar Allan Poe are, indeed, well-known for their Gothicism. His famous story "The Fall of the House of Usher (1839), for instance, unfolds all the terrors of the human soul. Furthermore, he also wrote many detective, horror, romantic and comic stories. All these stories successfully explore Gothic themes and motifs of aristocratic decay, death and instability.

Thus, it was Edgar Allan Poe who, with his masterful grip on the stories of 'terror', raised the Gothic genre to the peak of fame. He is best known today as the master of gothic horror tales and also the father of American Gothic literature.

Some famous Gothic novels and their writers are listed below:

- * The Castle of Otranto (1764) by Horace Walpole
- * The History of the Caliph Vathek (1786) by William Thomas Beckford
- * The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) by Ann Radcliffe
- * The Monk (1796) by Matthew Lewis.
- * Wieland (1798) by Charles Brockden Brown
- * Frankenstein (1818) by Mary Shelley
- * The Vampyre (1819) by William Polidori
- * Melmoth the Wanderer (1820) by Charles Maturin
- * The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831) by Victor Hugo
- * The Fall of the House of Usher (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe
- * Jane Eyre (1847) by Charlotte Bronte
- * Wuthering Heights (1847) by Emily Bronte

- * The House of the Seven Gables (1851) by Nathaniel Hawthorne
- * Carmilla (1872) by Sheridan le Fanu
- * We Have Always Lived in the Castle (1962) by Shirley Jackson.
- * Rosemary's Baby (1968) by Ira Levin

To conclude, Gothicism in Literature is considered to have originated from Romanticism, it is a sub genre of the English Romantic Movement. Both Romanticism and Gothicism were parallel movements Romanticism focused on the realization of nature's beauty, imagination, intuition, idealism, inspiration, and individuality in literature and other arts. Gothicism dealt with the darker and more tragic themes than the Romantic works, hence termed as Dark Romanticism.

