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**SEMIOTICS**

Semiotics is the science of signs. As a literary theory, semiology proposes that a great diversity of our human action and productions-our bodily postures and gestures, the social rituals we perform, the clothes we wear, the meals we serve, the buildings we inhabit-all convey "shared" meanings to members of a particular culture, and so can be analysed as signs which function in diverse kinds of signifying systems.

Linguistics (the study of verbal signs and structures) is one branch of semiotics that supplies the basic methods and terms which are used in the study of all other social sign systems. This unit examines the theoretical postulations of semiotic analysis. Semioticians apply structuralist insights to the study of what it calls sign systems. A *sign system* is a linguistic or non-linguistic object or behaviour (or collection of objects or behaviours) that can be analysed as if it were a specialised language. In other words, semiotics examines the ways linguistic and non-linguistic objects and behaviours operate symbolically to “tell” us something. In terms of literary analysis, semiotics is interested in literary conventions: the rules, literary devices, and formal elements that constitute literary structures. Semiotics recognises language as the most fundamental and important sign system.

While structural linguistics see linguistic sign as a union of signifier (sound image) and signified (concept to which the signifier refers), semiotics expands the signifier to include objects, gestures, activities, sounds, images—in short, anything that can be perceived by the senses. Clearly, semiotics gives the signifier a wide range of possibilities. However, of the three recognised classes of signs—index, icon, and symbol—semiotics limits its study to signs that function as symbols.

Among the major figures of this theory include Charles Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Gerard Genette, and Roland Barthes.

**CENTRAL CONCERNS OF SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS**

'Semiotics', or 'semiology', as we mentioned above means the systematic study of signs. Semiotics deals with the study of signs, their production and communication, their systematic grouping in languages or codes, and their social function. It is relevant to the study of literature, because literature uses language, the primary sign system in human culture, and is further organised through various subsidiary codes, such as generic conventions.

According to philosopher C. S. Peirce, there are three basic kinds of signs. These are:

1. The 'iconic', where the sign somehow resembled what it stood for (a photograph of a person, for example);

2. The 'indexical', in which the sign is somehow associated with what it is, for instance, a sign of smoke with fire or spots with measles);

3. The 'symbolic', where the sign is only arbitrarily or conventionally linked with its referent.

Semiotic study helps us understanding the distinction between 'denotation' (what the sign stands for) and 'connotation' (other signs associated with it); between codes (the rule-governed structures which produce meanings) and the messages transmitted by them; between the 'paradigmatic' (a whole class of signs which may stand in for one another) and the 'syntagmatic' (where signs are coupled together with each other in a 'chain').

Further, semiotics speaks of 'metalanguages', where one sign-system denotes another sign-system (the relation between literary criticism and literature, for instance); 'polysemic' signs which have more than one meaning, and a great many other technical concepts. One of the leading semioticians is Yury Lotman. To a large extent, structuralism and semiotics, as they impinged on literary studies, are often indistinguishable, especially when semiotics concentrated on the production of meaning rather than its communication.

Semiotics is central to structuralist linguistics, hence Saussure, from the structuralist and constructionalist approach, defined semiotics as 'the science of signs' with the purpose of understanding systematic regularities from which meaning is derived. Saussure treated language as a sign-system, and his work in linguistics supplied the concepts and methods that semioticians apply to sign-systems other than language. One such basic semiotic concept is Saussure’s distinction between the two inseparable components of a sign ‘the signifier’, which in language is a set of speech sounds or marks on a page, and ‘the signified’, which is the concept or idea behind the sign. Saussure also distinguished *parole,* or actual individual utterances, from *langue,* the underlying system of conventions that makes such utterances understandable; it is this underlying *langue* that most interests semioticians.

‘Semiotics', or 'semiology', means the systematic study of signs. Semiotics deals with the study of signs, their production and communication, their systematic grouping in languages or codes, and their social function. It includes the study of how meaning is constructed and understood. For semioticians, signs do not just 'convey' meanings, but constitute a medium in which meanings are constructed. Semiotics helps us to realise that meaning is not passively absorbed but arises only in the active process of interpretation.

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