



## E. L. DOCTOROW AS A POSTMODERN AMERICAN NOVELIST: THE ROLE OF HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

**Manoj Kumar Yadav<sup>i</sup>**

Dr., Independent Assistant Professor,  
and Researcher of English Literature,  
Lalawali (Bansur) Alwar,  
Rajasthan, India

### **Abstract:**

E. L. Doctorow was a popular American novelist. As a historical novelist of Postmodern America, he was a writer of high reputation and wide recognition. Postmodernism in America is a recent literary trend. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to highlight on the postmodernism in America with some references to modern critical canons and some of his major works. Postmodernism cannot be defined but it can be a way to analyze many aspects of modern time. Modernism denies following past events whereas postmodernists enjoy it. This theory has different opinions with the endless profiles of the time's continuity that stop us to its fixed definition. Postmodernism is not convinced and satisfied with the mere study of the bare facts of history because history is simply the record of the past events; so it wants to discover a way to describe the historical facts for justifying it also. Postmodernism emphasizes that past history must be studied in the perspective of the present. In other words, it can be said that the past must be resolved in light of the present. This paper also presents a comparative attempt on the emergence of postmodernism with the political prediction in the American political system figures.

**Keywords:** simultaneous, foundationalistic, emancipation, homogeneity, multifacetness, indeterministic, mundane, deconstruction

### **1. Methodology**

The descriptive and qualitative research methodology of historical and ethnography has been applied to this research work in which it studies systematically the records of human cultures and describes the produced works for such research. The research problems have been stated about the emergence of postmodernizing and, how could it be separated from modernism? The postmodern concept of history is thus different from the art of liberalism as well as of Marxism. On the one hand, it dismisses the

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [kkudrmanoj@gmail.com](mailto:kkudrmanoj@gmail.com), [rudrmanojyadav@gmail.com](mailto:rudrmanojyadav@gmail.com)

liberal concept of linear progressive development and progress of society and, on the other hand, it rejects Marx's hope of the emancipation of the whole humanity by the working class. How and why people dream to be an American citizen from all the world's corners? How does the novelist's philosophy affect the American civil political figures? And, the work of Doctorow that represents the contemporary American culture that is the main cause to lead towards postmodernism in the world. Therefore, consequently here, all the cultural and ethnic contents after the world war –II are being analyzed fruitfully.

## **2. Research Objectives**

In this article, the novels of E. L. Doctorow are studied in this perspective of postmodern American historical novels of historiographical metafiction. How do his novels reflect and show the American better life to everyone's dream of today, and the prediction about the American political system figures? A close and careful study of his novels shows that he always assumes a questioning and critical attitude towards the American past to the different aspects.

### **2.1 Literature Review**

Presently, English literature is characterized to its co-existence of fiction, as 19<sup>th</sup> century realism, 1930 modernism, and the postmodernism that appeared around 1960, having its origin in the Beat Movement. Postmodernism puts together old motifs, but in an ironic / periodic / pastiche manner; it is self-conscious; it combines high and popular culture, intellectual literature and politics, other influences came from painting. It can be placed rightly to both stylistically and ideologically by a belief on such literary traditions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, parody, paranoia, dark humor and authorial reference to a style that has emerged in the post-World War II era where a philosophical movement arose to assumptions allegedly present in the modernist philosophical ideas regarding culture, identity, history, and language that were developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment in which postmodernists were associated with the cultural movement and tendencies. Many critics acknowledge Doctorow's seminal contribution for the post-structuralism to the postmodernism on the wide thematic and stylistic features, aesthetics and intellectual engagement of the plots, traditional conflict modes, cultural danger of gender and its oppression, violence and objectification of the American pathetic and materialistic society and culture in his entire literary oeuvre of novels. His early novels present the fictional image of a shame, guilt, and violence in the US society and culture that brings to the critical and burning interrogations overall and around the meta-narrations of myths, politics, and tendency of a culture to monopolize the compositions of truth that came from the separate social and racial contexts which were refused to accept a place in the mainstream of historiography. Ultimately, the aim is to pin down the role that the fictional representation of the complex vicious circle of

shame, guilt and violence play in the novels' collective articulation of the US society and culture because of the American dreams.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Modernism versus Postmodernism

"I am the Postmodernist .....don't try to define me." Postmodernists are skeptical; they doubt everything but never tell where to believe. Questioning the authenticity and reliability of everything is the main task of postmodernists, but they do not possess the right answers. They don't have their own houses, but never stop petting stones to others' houses. They don't create any chaos but make the loud noise. Therefore, the theory of postmodernism cannot be defined but it can be the way of analyzing. This theory has different opinions with the endless profiles of the time's continuity that stops us to its fixed definition. It's all the genres get readers on the common feelings without any newness because of using many past events so postmodernism is not the way of *thinking*, but it's a way of *analyzing* by a fixed *technique*. While modernism denies following the past event to which it says *goodbye* that breaks from the tradition to do new experiments. Therefore, modernists don't look at the past while postmodernists enjoy it. The work of modernist is based on the writer-centered that is written with the deep and experiences of the writer; while postmodernist's work is based on the *reader response theory* that is based on the reader-centered. All the new experiments and innovative practices are performed into the modernist's work but historical references, irony, and parody are the main tools of the postmodernist's works; where modernists *come to an end for the results* while postmodernists *come to the new beginning*. In the texts, allusions, cross-references, experimentation, break from tradition, nostalgia; fragmentations are the main tools to understand well the modernism while inter-textually, hypertext, disorientation, meta- language, distortion, and also metafiction are the special characteristics of the postmodernism. Modernists believed in the firsthand experience of the elements and respect to realism where postmodernists were followers to the hyper-reality, where they played the role of parasites which exploited and brought up to the new hope of literature with the different streams and areas, unlike modernists.

#### 3.2 Postmodernism and the American Dreams

Postmodernism is still the same cultural society but it differs *within* and *beyond* the present culture that refers to a cultural reaction by the way of living and behavior of the people who break from the tradition to the new prosperity for the better life due to a sense of cultural disillusionment. Therefore, people dreamt and planned to enter a new era *beyond* modernity. So it can be expanded that postmodernism is a useful theory for evaluation precisely of detached or disagreement of the opinions to the media texts that they have come over in addition with the socio-cultural context of the text's composition and comprehension of the inter-relationship between media texts that kept

running all worldviews were constructed by historical documents to the culture and religion that could see as a function of *power* rather than *truth*. So postmodernism encompasses theories of arts, literature, architecture, feminism, postcolonialism, post-structuralism, self-reflexivity, gender, race, sexuality, nation, multiculturalism, etc. Postmodern culture is a reflection of this new world that may be the new world has also changed the direction of the relationship or it may be now works in both directions with culture changing material life that is a consequence of modernity, and not a universal feature. The most cultures and societies of the world were being suffocated globally before World War II but after it all the cultures and religions came to close globally (local to global culture) for knowing each other and finally got the message that how could be survived a better life free from the fear and suffocation of the danger of gender, sexuality, equality of human rights, caste, creed, culture, religion, and poor life surviving. People started to upgrade and changed their way of living to a better life within their own traditions in the local region and reign, and beyond the myths and false social rituals and ethics. They were started getting the education and would have become able to understand the miracles of emerging science. Therefore, they could come over the trends and tendencies of the tradition and started to erect new architectures, rail lines, cables, roads, and the new science inventions that could happen a more new possible expectations and opportunities in the USA that country was getting signs of progress constantly with the new and advanced science incarnations that could emerge a new hope and dream of the present generation to relocate for a better and smooth life that is remained only a hope at American modern which was pioneer advanced, and beyond the mythical culture, that was not making any kind of discrimination with the culture, sex, religion, and human rights, and it was determined to the citizens' protection with this tendency that people from the world's corners were here different and better within the culture and their lifestyle was beyond the world's old, odd, and mythical culture, they were here in the new world of the present generation to the *oneness*.

American pop culture was always influential to immigrating in search of a better life here the world over. Therefore, American dreams were with a postmodern attitude. For example, Las Vegas was only in many ways a perfect example of a postmodern city. It had become infamous for being America's *sin capital* for its hedonistic tourist industry. Rebelling against the modernistic ideals of wholeness and family values, Vegas was the ultimate destination for drugs, sex and gambling, making it often associated with selfishness and recklessness. Its iconic place in American pop culture had led it to be considered to be the place to go to experience the American Dream's *Las Vegas* was founded in 1905, right at the turn of the 20th century - meaning it was built up around modernist principles - yet it had evolved over the years into a postmodern city. Postmodernist era gave rise to mainstream of culture - drugs had every time been used by people throughout history but never were they so prominent in culture. The rise of psychedelic used and drugged experimentation in the 60s was hugely influential on pop culture and resulted in icons such as the Beatles and many other artists and

musicians. This culture was very much about exploring the mind on a metaphysical level and the way people thought began to change. Their culture was obsessed with glamour and beauty, but they were usually merely seen as objects to be admired that's the main cause fell here to attract people from all the corners of the world to immigrant to the USA for a better life surviving here within the culture and beyond their danger of gender, multi-cultural/lingual/religion/racial, and caste/creed/color of the local culture.

### 3.3 Doctorow and the USA Political Figures

He was a great mythologist and psychologist of the American thoughts. Doctorow warned the USA in his novels that the USA was again coming to resemble its 19<sup>th</sup> century self in terms of violence, poverty, inequity and plutocratic rule. The themes, characterizations, plot unities of his novels could succeed to give birth such a syndrome that could bear up and bloom like a virus over the American socio-political scenario. His thoughts on religion, history, and a new philosophy of modernism have generated indirectly the lobby in favor of Donald J Trump to be president of the USA. Doctorow died on July 21, 2015, after a month of Trump's oath of presidentship while unfortunately Donald Trump eventually takes notice, of course, and fired off a stream of tweets calling Doctorow a *washed up-has-been loser writer nobody ever heard of. Who's [sic] books are garbage and he LIES because he knows NOTHING about me.* Readers may confirm this in the news, his books selling on the Amazon lists. But on the other way formerly President Barack Obama named Doctorow as one of the country's best writers, and *Ragtime* as one of his own favorite books. In responding him, Doctorow says, *I would have voted for him anyway, a great man, and I'm not just saying that because he reads my books.* Doctorow was a lifelong agnostic too, and he hadn't suddenly found God on his deathbed, he couldn't quite work out how he'd written. The prose moves like water-changing, sparkling, rippling, and so placid in places. He was shown at his most avant-garde-a Depression-era tale of itinerant poets, secret mansions, circus freaks and union disputes, assembled from fragments of straight narration, blank verse and eerie screeds of biographical date akin to FBI profiles. So there is nothing to stop us telling a story in which Doctorow lives on into the present.

Some professors of English blame on the works of Doctorow that he has a thin and newly vehement drawing line between *good and bad stories*, where he is unable to understand and much confusing; but other have a great fun and heart light pleasure, some readers like to record his works and upload on YouTube, web links, web sites, and intranets etc. By which he means that we need the stories, and we must to tell them with the requisite conviction that there may yet be *salvation in witness and moral assignment*. Fiction and nonfiction- no matters- *there is only narrative*, he says. Hillary Clinton's defeat, after all, was a failure of storytelling. Young leftists heard this and recognize the truth of it. Doctorow becomes, in his dotage, the voice of a movement. Readers, supporters, disciples adopt him as a more mysterious, more playful persuasive alternative to Bernie Sanders (albeit ten years the senator's senior).

This is nothing that what would the author want for himself. He was not a political animal, and professionally speaking, he deferred to a rising generation of writers like other national writers, who had read his works and taken it to heart hearing. They stood really to combust the myths of General Lee, of Milton Friedman, of Henry Kissinger, and of Steve Bannon. Their sense of historical identity proceeded from the bone-deep knowledge that the USA had never been great, or not yet anyway, and accepting this must be the first step towards making it so.

### **3.4 Postmodernism versus E. L. Doctorow**

With the rise of conservative and conventional forces in the USA and subsequent vast expansion of American capitalism in the different parts of the world and the simultaneous awakening of the last and the International Working Class Movement, Daniel Bells' presumption of the end of ideology and morality, Alvin Toffler's forecast of the emergence of a non-communist and non-capitalist third wave civilization gained good ground in the West. In the background of such an intellectual climate was born the Movement of Postmodernism which openly and overtly challenged the western tradition of liberal humanism and Marxism. Its propounders and followers claimed that both liberalism and Marxism which originated in the background of 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, the concept of reason and progress had been a hidden source of intellectual and physical oppression of mankind. For the Postmodernist Thinkers, all the metanarratives presented by Christianity, Marxism and Freudianism had become obsolete and outdated. They argue, as Christopher Morris says that "*the whole kit and Caboodles of Marxist thought – class conflict, ideology, forces and relations of production, surplus values, alienation and the rest – and just so much useless, metaphysical baggage, left over from the old enlightenment metanarratives of progress, reason and truth.*"<sup>1</sup> They challenged the validity and utility of the basic assumptions of liberal humanism on the ground that they were provisional, not permanent, and therefore, they must be closely and carefully examined in their historical perspectives. In the same way, they rejected Marx's concept of historical materialism, that is to say, the economic interpretation of history, and argued that both liberalism and Marxism have centralizing and totalizing impulse and instinct because they have a foundationalistic or essentialistic tendency. Drawing inspiration from Michel Foucault's theory of the discontinuity of history, they also share his view that since the Enlightenment, the ruling class used reason (knowledge) for maintaining its power. And that is why the bourgeoisie used the theory of totalization through positivist systems of integrating desperate and disparate materials. Therefore, the postmodernist does not believe in either the holistic approach or in the theory of its continuity nor closure. Another the strong branch of socio-cultural gender is feminism that came in 18<sup>th</sup> century but it grew up healthy and wealthy after 1960s the women literature has been honored properly and also offered to its writings a respected place equally, but later on it could be accepted normally that has vast and huge area of writings and researches which is studied and taught on the priority in the present time.

*“The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women’s rights and interests. Although the terms “feminism” and “feminist” did not gain widespread use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public parlance much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the “feminist movement” in the 1942 film ‘Woman of the Year’ (www.jeltl.org 2018, Vol. 3 (1), 59 - 60).*

This movement pushed up to the postmodernism that could bloom and balloon widespread together in the USA. Therefore, woman class is surviving an open movement and frank life equally with the better opportunities and priorities.

The postmodern concept of history is thus different from the art of liberalism as well as of Marxism. On the one hand, it dismisses the liberal concept of linear progressive development and progress of society and, on the other hand, it rejects Marx’s hope of the emancipation of the whole humanity by the working class. Instead of subscribing to the Marxian theory of the central role to be played by the working class in the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie, it emphasizes that apart from the works, there are *silent* groups differentiated by a race, gender, ethnicity and minority status whose the question of survived is equality of important value. So in place of maintaining any social homogeneity and plurality in society, instead of carrying on the age-old faith in a homogenous and moralistic culture characterized by the domination of middle class, male heterosexual, white Western population, the multi-facetness of the Western society should be properly studied. Keeping in view, the changes brought about by late capitalism through the revolution in the field of science technology, computer science and mass media, the growing importance of the local and regional characteristics of cultures of the Doctorow and different parts of the world must be taken into consideration.

Postmodernism is not convinced and satisfied with the mere study of the bare facts of history because history is simply the record of the past events; so it wants to discover a way to describe the historical facts for justifying *“one mode of explaining them rather than another”*.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in the study of history, philosophy is also involved. For example, the theoreticians of postmodernism consider that *history, as currently conceived, is a kind of historical accident, a product of a specific historical situation, and that, with the passing of the miscommunication and the misunderstandings that produced that situation, history may lose its status as an independent autonomous and self-authenticating mode of thought*. Hayden White is of the view that the present generation of historians is faced with the difficult task of explaining, *“the historically conditioned character of historical disciplines”* and of *“presiding over the dissolutions of history claim to autonomy among disciplines”*.<sup>3</sup>

Like Marx and Engels and other social thinkers, the postmodernists also condemn and criticize history as the politics of the past that deals with the stories of kings, queens, wars and ministerial intrigues and lay emphasis on the importance of studying previously neglected social, cultural and economic aspects of life. Besides these, they hold that history in itself is provisional and indeterminant. They go to the extent of saying that history does not make history absolute nor does it deny the existence of the past. It only means that history is a human construct and that its accessibility is entirely conditioned by textuality, as Hutcheon truly says, "*We cannot know the past except through its texts, its documents, its evidence, even its eyewitness accounts are texts. Even the institutions of the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense, as social texts*".<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, they do not deny the importance of historical knowledge and experiences. Reacting to the comments of Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton that postmodernism is nostalgic in its relation to the past. Linda Hutcheon, a prominent theoretician of postmodernism says, "*But if nostalgia connotes evasion of the present idealization of a past or a recovery of that past as Edenic, then the postmodernist ironic rethinking of history is definitely not nostalgic. It critically confronts the past with the present and Vice-Versa. In a direct reaction against the tendency of our times to value only the new and novel, it returns us to a rethought past to see what, if anything, is of value in that past experience. But the critique of its irony is double-edged the past and the present are judged in each other's light*".<sup>5</sup>

In spite of their so much fascination for history, postmodernists do not find any objective truth in it. In the works of Gerald Graft, for them, history is "an innumerable flux of phenomena, lacking in inherent significance and structure". Therefore, he remarks that "*no exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination can be anything but a dishonest refuge from the truth*".<sup>6</sup>

But the supporters and advocates of postmodernism say that for them, validation of a historical fact is not as important as is its signification, as Hutcheon rightly remarks, "*The meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past events into present historical facts. This is not a dishonest refuge from the truth but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs*".<sup>7</sup>

Postmodernism emphasizes that past history must be studied in the perspective of the present scenario. In other words, it can be said that the past must be resolved in light of the present status. Hutcheon calls it *the presence of the past* or its *presentification*. She, however, admits that postmodernists cannot claim to offer what Jameson desires, *genuine historicity, the social, historical and existential present and the past as referent or an ultimate object*. She further says, "*The past as referent is not bracketed or effaced as Jameson would like to believe; it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning*".<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the eponymous characters of the novel, *Billy Bathgate* (1989) reminds the story of New York gangsters old-timely; some modern gentle-men/ couples are enjoying under the prohibited moonlit of Manhattan. Consequently, this novel shows the whole shifting synthesized socio-cultural picture aesthetically from old to newness



on the road of modernism that cannot be blamed as a fictive analogue; but it sustained the progressive national narratives among the Americans who were on the polyphonic chronicle of the betrayal, disfigurement and eternal deferral of his country's original promise. As, Edward Albee well said in his play, *The Zoo Story*,

*"Where, people are alleged to live an animal cage life because present generations do not have social contacts consequently they are isolated, bias, and frustrated into their own existence. Therefore, American multicultural citizens are stayed beyond the civilized cultures and religions. Now, they are surviving under the shadow of the cold- morals and animal culture for using violence; while enlightened hearts have desires to their friendly communication and building up a relationship for someone has never been satisfied. Thus, it shows the conversational discrepancy between lower class and upper class in the American pathetic society; as well as Indian cultural cage of caste and creed system is facing from the centuries".* (www.ijllt.org, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2018, 68)

This inspiration sources had been experienced by Doctorow also with his growing childhood as his parents were suffered a lot during the World War II in Europe, but his grandfather brought him to Belarus when he was working as a script proofreader for Columbia Pictures.

Postmodern American fiction is based on and related to these basic promises of historiography. It contests the modernist concept of the autonomy of art and emphasizes its self-reflexive (or self-conscious) character, yet it does not lose sight of the significance of historical events and personage. In this way, it is what Hutcheon calls *historiographic metafiction*. That is, the Postmodern American novelist has a theoretical self-consciousness of history and fiction as a human construct so that he may rethink to rework on the forms and contexts of the past. He examines the different aspects of the legacies of liberal humanism: *"autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin,"*<sup>9</sup> for seeing how far and how much they are related to the real experience. He raises certain questions about them as to who has propounded them, when they were propounded and why they were propounded at all. He challenges the very criteria on which order and coherence are judged. Here it may be noted that this spirit of imagination or questioning owes its origin to the radical movement of the sixties.

As it is seen that the Marxists criticize Postmodernism for its negligence of history; they also denounce postmodern fiction as dehistoricized. But the theorist of postmodernism refute this charge and say that they are very much engaged with the problems of historical representation and knowledge, though they do not subscribe to the holistic Marxian theory of history because they try to seek to problematize history. It is true that postmodern novelists denaturalize history because they are self-conscious of *"the distinction between the brute events of the past, and the historical facts we construct out of*

*them. Facts are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives, therefore, derive different facts from the same events".<sup>10</sup>*

The postmodernists consider that the forms of the narrative of both history and fiction are suitable and significant systems of the Western culture, modes of "*mediating the world for the purpose of introducing meaning*"<sup>11</sup>, says E. L. Doctorow. Both history and fiction are psychological domination, cultural systems, ideological constructions whose ideology includes their appearance of being autonomous and self-contained. In this context, to quote Doctorow once again would be proper, "*History is a kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive, and fiction is a kind of speculative history ... by which the available data for the composition is seen to be greater and more varied in its sources than the historian supposes*"<sup>12</sup>. In other words, it can be said, that for a historiographical metafictionist, the world he presents in his work is both fictive and historical: history deals with the real or factual world but fiction refers to a fictive world. But, should there be any correlation between the two? Should a historiographical metafictionist present in his work an event which never happened or occurred? Should he be allowed to work on the historical material so *self-consciously* as to falsify historical truth? To all these important questions, Doctorow provides an answer to justify his description in the novel, *Ragtime*, of an episode in which Sigmund Freud, John Pierpont Morgan and Henry Ford meet : "*I am satisfied that everything I made up about Moran and Ford is true, whether it happened or not. Perhaps truer because it didn't happen.*"<sup>13</sup> This *self-consciousness* derives him to declare or proclaim that the writer is an independent writer as are all, ever eye-witnesses. Thus, for a metafictionist, past was once upon a time real, but now it is lost or at least displaced so that it may be reconstructed as "*the referent of language, the real or trace of the real.*"<sup>14</sup>

However, postmodernists justify the appreciation of history in fiction by referring to the ideological underpinning of a work of art. That is to say, if, the past has to be interpreted and illustrated in the light of the present, naturally the ideology of the writer will overshadow his methodology of analysis as White observes, "*Every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications.*"<sup>15</sup> In this context, Leonard Davis also remarks, "*Novels do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology.*"<sup>16</sup> But on the other hand, Jameson and Eagleton hold that the American metafiction provides an aestheticist separation from the historical and political. Really speaking, some other leftist critics who appreciate its self-reflexivity for its effort to liberate the reader's mind from the ties and tethers of dominantly prevailing social systems and political institutions, which are enshrined in the works of history and literature. Yet criticism of American metafiction still confuses a lot, particularly because its ideological grounding is limited to a mere critical stance as Hutcheon honestly admits when he says, "*It is not truly radical, nor is it truly oppositional.*"<sup>17</sup> She goes to the extent of saying that it has no ideology. But in our view, this does not seem to be a true assessment of the postmodern American fiction, for it does a radical outlook and thus plays the role of an oppositional force. Jameson has rightly acclaimed Doctorow as "*a serious artist and one of the few genuinely left or radical novelists at work today*".<sup>18</sup> Of course,

its radicalism is limited to interrogation and questioning, therefore, it does not care to provide an alternative social system which would be better than that which it condemns and criticizes. That is the reason why Hutcheon proclaims that *historiographical metafiction* is not *ideological novel* ..... they do not seek through the vehicle of fiction, to persuade their readers of the correctness of a particular way of interpreting the world. Instead, they make their readers question their own (and by implication, the other) interpretation. They are more *Romans a Hypotheses* than *A Romans A these*.

Therefore, here, the novels of E. L. Doctorow are studied in this perspective of postmodern American historical novels of historiographical metafiction. A close and careful reading of his novels shows that he always assumes a questioning and critical attitude towards the American past.

For instance, in his first novel, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960), Doctorow depicts the rise and fall of a Western town, which was founded on an illusory dream. Unlike *Blue*, its protagonist is the businessman of the town who is concerned only for himself and has no vision of the town as a co-operative enterprise. Doctorow means to suggest that such shortsighted selfishness of American capitalism breeds its own destruction. So this novel ends with a dream the reality of which has been undercut by the novel itself. Doctorow's another novel, *The Book of Daniel* (1971), is a fictionalized account of the events surrounding the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Jewish immigrants who were convicted and executed in the early 1950s for plotting conspiracy to commit treason and treachery. The focus of the narrative is on the devastating and plundering impact of the deaths on their children. The novel is considered by many to be a poignant and pungent critique of the anti-communist climate during the McCarthy era.

It is also casted a noteworthy and significant light on the postmodern devices and empathy of acceptance to the newness that reveals the appearance of the American contemporary literary canons in his historical novel, *Ragtime* (1975) that tells the story of the psychic and unpleasant encounter of three families among first is angry and hatred, second is Jewish immigrant, and third is African-American that interacts with the historical figures and participated in some of the most transcendental events to its multilayered narratives, historical settings, and personages while exploring issues also are relevantly important to contemporary society in Northern American modern pop culture. The central theme of this novel is the portrayal of characters who search for the mundane, material prosperity, progress, and the social equality as promised by the *American Dream* but who ultimately became victims of class division in a capitalist society. According to Doctorow, history is a cynical process in which man falls to prey for a future over which he has no command or control.

In the another novel, *Loon Lake* (1980), we also find a fictionalized social history of roughly the first half of the twentieth century, with an emphasis laid on the period of the Great Depression. We may consider this novel as an antithesis of *Ragtime* in mood and its narrative of effectiveness.

Moreover, there has also been marked a shift in the postmodern theorists' attitude towards Marxism in recent years and its impacts on the novels of Doctorow, if

any, in the later eighties and early nineties they bag to highlight their indebtedness to Marx. In this connection, Jonathan Arac remarked in his 'introduction' to *Boundary 2* symposium on *Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics* that post 1960s Marxism and postmodernism "*share the connection that literature and theory and criticism are not only contemplative, not mere superstructures, but active; they share commitments to human life in history; in short; they share the world*".<sup>20</sup>

Hutcheon observes that both postmodern art and Marxist theory are engaged in "*contextualized institutional critique*".<sup>21</sup> She further adds, "*When Jameson asserts that there is nothing. That is not social and historical, and in the last analysis political, he echoes what John Berger remarks in his novel, G (1972), 'sexual passion may have varied little throughout recorded history. But the account one renders oneself about being in love is always informed and modified by the specific culture and social relation of the time'*".<sup>22</sup> Hutcheon endures the popular Marxism and comments, *History and ideology are equality inescapable in postmodernism*. She is also conscious of the significance of contradiction as outlined by Marx: "*Marxism offers a model that stresses contradiction, and that is what is of value for postmodernism*".<sup>23</sup> Even Jacques Derrida, the propounder of the theory of deconstruction, has to revive his interest in Marxism (*Specters of Marx*, 1994) for use it as an instrument of critique only. Similarly, Michael Rayon, a deconstructionist, also argues for *a dynamic, open-ended, non-metaphysical, anti-foundational and multi-levelled, non-mechanized Marxism*. (*Marxism and Deconstruction*, 1982)

Hutcheon finds much closeness between historiographical metafiction and Bertolt's concept of epic theatre. She says, "*Both, for instance, place the receiver in a paradoxical position, both inside and outside participatory and critical: we are to be thoughtful and analytic, rather than either passive or unthinkingly emphatic. Both are equally accessible and entertaining and equally didactic. For Brecht the entire act of enunciation was important: the text's reception and production as well as the social and cultural relations in which they operate*",<sup>24</sup> and the same is the case with postmodernism. Both epic theatre and postmodernism challenge the concept of linear development and causality which as Brecht says, *reinforce the dominant ideology*.

Postmodernism gives the credence and confidence to Brecht's technique of contradiction: *Zigzag form*, and *the instability of every circumstance* for arousing the consciousness of the audience to change the existing system. Postmodernism, like epic theatre, lays stress on the importance of contradictions in character portrayal for contesting the bourgeois notion of the unified subjects. Brecht says that the continuity of the ego is a myth and adds that neither ideology should be marked nor should contradiction in character or plot be smoothed out. The subject should be used as an object of enquiry and problematization. Postmodern art and Brecht's epic theatre challenge the liberal humanist concept of originality, uniqueness, authority and universality. In this context once again we can quote Hutcheon who says, "*Both paradoxically rewrite the historical events and works of the art of the past, thereby questioning the stability of the meaning of both. By incorporating known historical events and personages within their texts, both manage to problematize historical knowledge and to create illusionist*

frame".<sup>25</sup> Bringing out another dimension of similarity between the work of Brecht and of postmodernism, she further says that both value the process of creation of an art-look over the finished work and therefore *the text qua formal text has no fixed and final value in and for itself. It is not a closed and fictionalized object but an open process with an enunciative situation that changes with each receiver whose ideological positioning as a consumer is what epic theatre and postmodernism attempt to subvert.* She believes that postmodernism exploits as well as subverts more than Brecht would have ever allowed: *"It usually installs the consume subject – position and then undermines it by making the receiver aware of the moves of representation operative into text. Its self-reflexivity still points, however, to the fact that art does not innocently reflect or convey reality; rather it creates or signifies it, in the sense that it makes it meaningful"*. This is how Brecht intended the *"combative verfremdung effect"* to function moving the receiver from *"general passive acceptance of a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry"*.<sup>26</sup> Postmodern art also functions in a similar way. Catherine Belsey points to the interrogative character of Brecht's work and observes that it invites the readers to seek an answer to the questions raised therein. Postmodern art also asks certain questions by revealing the contradictions within the prevailing ideology. And this is what Doctorow did in his novels and here in lays his left-oriented radicalism.

#### 4. Conclusion

Facts are the images of history, just as images are the facts of fiction. History is a battlefield. It's constantly being fought over because the past controls the present. Doctorow's work is likely because he had a public profile to speak and much of an authorial signature. He was an immaculate stylist who delivered every novel in a different register. Doctorow expressed a growing fear of American atavism, a return to the social conditions of appraisal and dislike. He shows a mosaic and multi-colored pictorial picture of the world into the American better life on the adverse presentations and phenomenal balloon of pathetic culture. His novels reveal the common subjects with the perfect use of metaphor, irony, black humor and comedy, typical diction, common symbols, public colloquial, and adequate satire among his learned readers. He mentions deeply to privilege the central characters over the surrounding crowds of shopkeepers, beggars, millenarians, factory workers, and ubiquitous street children into American ethnography on the ground of anthropological charismas from historiography where his novels make all the predictions to the coming American life and events throughout the periods.

#### About the Author

**Dr. Manoj Kumar Yadav** is an independent Assistant Professor and researcher of English Literature who has experience of teaching more than 12 years at international universities.

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