Call for Papers

Four-day International Webinar

on

Post-truth and Literature: Perspectives and Reality

organized by

Department of English Language and Literature
Islamic University of Science and Technology Awantipora
22nd to 25th March 2022

Concept Note
Post-truth and Literature: Perspectives and Reality

The pluralistic approach to truth, whose prominent supporters include Crispin Wright and Michael Lynch, maintains the conceptual diversity and manifold manifestations of truth. In today's world our factual truth is never completely free of interpretation or personal perspective. The blurring of the differentiation between fact-based truth and opinion has been intensified by both traditional and modern-day media. There has been a profound distrust about traditional sources of news as these are now thought of to be in the same light as the corrupt states they serve and protect. In countries like India and Russia, the mainstream media started behaving like public relation apparatuses for the people in power. This has thrown the masses into further confusion about objective reality, facts and, ultimately, truth. This pervasive uncertainty about news from mainstream media forced people to take recourse to social media. There was an unprecedented acceptance of social media outlets as truthful because they fed, what media theorists call, people's "confirmation bias". However social media outlets have evolved into a platform of false news and propaganda and are being used by the powerful to manipulate the weak. Computational propaganda campaigns have used social media technologies to control rather than liberate by spreading dangerous rumours, disinformation and political attacks. "We must reject the perennial prophets of doom and their predictions of the apocalypse". Former President of US, Donald J Trump made this statement in response to the real threat of climate change which is grounded in scientifically rigorous empirical evidence. The discrediting of empirical and verifiable facts in favour of fabrications ushered in the age of post-truth. Its profound political impacts were evident in the referendum for Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump in US election in 2016. Trump also successfully managed to hijack the term "fake news" from the liberal media to describe legitimate news outlets like CNN and the New York Times. His public relations team engaged itself in the propagation of "alternative facts" (often compared to the Orwellian terms 'newspeak' and 'doublethink'), as Kelly Anne Conway put it in a Meet the Press interview, as opposed to verifiable factual information. In recognition of the widespread uncertainty around truth, *Oxford Dictionary* declared "posttruth" as the word of the year 2016 and defined it "as a term relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." We, therefore, live at a time today when we look back at truth with a twinge of nostalgia.

The idea of absolute truth came to be questioned by Nietzsche who propounded the possibility of perspective and interpretation driven by person's interest or will to power. The idea of truth came to be challenged further by Derrida who while opposing the logo centric structure and patterns of Western thinking claimed that there could be no universal source of logic and meaning. In fact, post structuralists underscored the ability to create totally unexpected outcomes from the analysis of a text opening up, thereby the prospects for multiplicity of interpretations.

The concept of truth in philosophy can be traced back to Plato who through his interlocutor, Socrates warned of the dangers that waylay the false claims to knowledge. The correspondence theory of truth whose prominent supporters include Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, maintains that the key to truth is a relation between a proposition and a world—a proposition

is true if only and only if it corresponds to a fact in the world. Although the need to judge the truth of a statement by the extent to which it fits the reality has been the determining prerequisite for a proper theory of truth yet it is the blurring of the dividing lines between fact, opinion and interpretation that has become a cause of concern. One cannot but agree with the American philosopher Daniel Dennett: "…the real danger before us is that we have lost respect for truth and facts and have lost the desire to understand the world on the basis of facts." In this post-truth era, not only have some facts superseded others but people prefer those facts that concur with their opinion and personal perspectives. One of the questions raised by the concept of post truth is whether it is a new phenomenon or an existing phenomenon that gained prominence due to particular circumstances and therefore acquired a new name.

A bone of contention in this raging debate on post truth is whether postmodernist thought is the harbinger of the post truth phenomenon. On one side of the debate are those who customarily assert that the seedbed of post truth era is the postmodernist rejection of a single objective truth in favour of a multitude of subjective and relative truths. On the other side of the divide are those who aver that post truth and fake news had always been around and refute the concomitance of post truth and postmodernism. They cite the post truth tactics of the Nazi Reich as an example that the blurring of truth and lie has been a recurrent theme in history. What is happening in the post-truth era of today is what Plato feared would happen—the criteria is not what is true or what is false but rather the criteria of truth and particularly who determine what the criteria are. Still there are others who express profound gratitude to postmodernism as a philosophical school of thought that helps humanity make sense of the fragmented world it currently inhabits.

In the 19th century, there was a widespread consensus on the character of the real and the realist novel was built on this agreement on the nature of the real. In the 20th century, the 19th century consensus with regard to its view of reality was revealed as fragile with writers from Kafka to Ralph Ellison and Gabriel Garcia Marquez creating stranger and surreal texts to explain the world through conflicting and incompatible narratives. This made the use of techniques like magical realism possible, where the natural and supernatural, fact and fiction, history and story, co-exist on the same plane in intertwined, indistinguishable formations.

Our understanding of the uniqueness and characteristics of post-truth phenomenon can be deepened through an exploration of the links between literature and competing conceptions of truth. What specifically must be the role of the literary arts in the post truth world? Can our relationship with literature help us make sense of a post truth society? Can literature help rebuild our belief in reality and faith in the truth? Has the ubiquity of narratives devalued truth or enhanced morality by yearning for that golden age when truth was uncontested and universally accepted? Can telling a false story be more compelling than telling the truth? Does representing undisguised untruth present what psychologists refer to as counterfactual thinking and philosophers' term as possible worlds? Does literature present self-serving falsehoods as facts and more reliable information as false news? Does literature highlight the struggle for truth that minorities have to fight for over those in power? How do we get the truth/meaning in post truth era literature?

Literature, hence, has always had a troubled relationship with truth. We are yet to have meaningful conversations on how the landscapes of literary representation and criticism may react to the post-truth era, which is what we intend to do in this interdisciplinary webinar on

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"Post-truth and Literature". One of the most prominent characteristics of the post truth phenomenon is its variety of interpretations, the confusion surrounding it and the difficulty in understanding it. Therefore, the objective of this webinar is also to unearth the ambiguity surrounding this post truth phenomenon. Technology is what brokers reality to us today. The highlight of the event would be to deliberate upon the difficulty of clarifying the truth value of most of the information disseminated through technology like the internet and social networks. In addition to these themes, the following areas of exploration are also suggested but, by no means, prescribed:

1. Critical theory and post-truth
2. Post-truth and cultural mediations
3. Literary representations and post-truth
4. Literary criticism and post-truth
5. Social media, rumours and the culture of fabrication
6. Literary experimentations around the uncertainty about truth
7. The post-truth politics and literature
8. Postmodernism and its relationship with post truth
9. Post truth, journalism and mass media

Who can participate?
Faculty/Scholars from disciplines of Literature, Political Science, Sociology and Media and Journalism.

About the University:
The Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) is located in Awantipora (Jammu and Kashmir) approximately 30 km south of Srinagar, between the beautiful Wastoorvan mountain range on the one side and a majestic view of the Jhelum and Pir Panjal on the other. The University is adjacent to the famed saffron fields. This historically significant town was the capital of Kashmir during the reign of Raja Awantivarman.

The university was established through an Act passed by J&K Legislature and notified through Jammu &Kashmir Government Gazette in 2005. The academic programs started in the varsity from July 2006. The University is accredited by NAAC and is recognized by University Grants Commission (UGC) under Section2(f) and Section 12(b) of UGC Act. The Technical, Nursing and Architectural programmes offered by the University are approved by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Indian Nursing Council (INC) and Council of Architecture (COA) respectively. The University is a member of Association of Indian Universities (AIU). The university strives to nurture an environment where students can develop, cultivate and support an academic culture that values interdisciplinary learning. The focus is on promoting studies and research that are socially relevant and that make the students aware of their social and cultural responsibilities.

About the Department:
The Department of English Language and Literature was established in 2008.The department aims at developing a literary temper amongst students by providing a platform from which they can explore the relationship between historical texts and their diverse influence on modern society. We believe the study of traditional and new genres will inspire creative and critical thought and enable students to communicate concisely, fluently and with ingenuity. The Department has a state-of-the-art Digital Language Lab aiding to foster and chisel language skills of the students. Also, it has a literary club "Literati" to hone the creative skills and potential of students. The department offers B.A.(Hons.) in English, Masters Programme in English, and PhD.

Submission of Abstracts:

Faculty and Scholars can submit their abstracts (max 250 words) and a brief Bio note (100 words) as a word document at *english@islamicuniversity.edu.in*

Important Dates:
Last date of submission of abstracts: 20th February 2022

Information with regard to acceptance of abstracts: 1st March 2022

Registration Fee:
INR 500/-