

I: Dostoevsky and Critical Reception on his Literary Works

Justification to the Thesis Title

Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* vividly questions on the social norms of the existing Russian society. The main character frequently asks questions on his position that underpins the socio-cultural construction and tries to explain the middle class socio-cultural values and practices in Russian society. They exist among the distinct individual, groups and communities as the norms to continue their life. The novel seems to be troublesome and difficult as it stands for the questions of the validity of such norms. It throws light on the disabled character's interrogative lifestyles; openly appears contrary to the norms, and blurs the distinction between the ability and disability. They are grounded the social construction of the norms. Thus, this research is based on the study of the character's practical way of life and upcoming consequences of his questioning the norms that also beautifully reflects the situation of the development of main character's space and position in the Russian middle class society.

The novel explores protagonist dynamic relations in the changing context of the complex world structure where he finds no changes in the society for him and his colleagues. It presents clear examples of both dimensions of histories as linear and circular or dynamic that could not do any justice to them in Russian society. The author's presentation of main character is dissatisfied with the socio-cultural practices taken as the social norms are the results of socio-political agenda of his time. In this instance, such socio-political agenda develops as the social norms amuses to the main character rather others have mocked and amused him. His innocent childlike situation and belief on the conventionality cannot do anything. His several attempts to achieve heaven on earth did not match with the Russian middle class socio-cultural values and practice instead just remains as the social norms. The research tries to deal with the

disabled character's interrogative lifestyles that reflects the frequent interaction with the very social norms and tends to find out the uniting relationship out of the ability and disability binaries. It is possible through the new historicist perspectives.

Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* presents the unnamed narrator who is antagonistic in tone and questions on the existing sense of morality as well as the foundations of rational thinking. They could not justify his living society as a result of which the main character comes along with interrogative expressions. In the text, the narrator describes himself derisively referring to himself as a conscious intellectual, an epileptic and a delirious man upon whom the Russian society focuses with amusement. Endowed with psychedelic attributes and professing a childlike, innocent belief in possibility of achieving heaven on earth, he fails to cooperate with Russian middle class socio-cultural values and practices. A pile of questions regarding the social norms has brought greater changes in the psychology of the character are narrated through the story of the novel. However, he raises the questions against such social norms possibly as a failure to achieve the heaven on earth.

The interrogative expressions can be seen as a prominent issue that the characters come across in *Notes from Underground*. For example, there are higher, middle and lower class people representing different positions. The main character is marginalized and cannot fit in any position out of which there emerge so many questions regarding the socio-cultural construction. On the other side, he has made his own norms that do not fit in for him. Whatsoever he faces and struggles can be seen from the marginal viewpoint while the way amusers behave toward them seems to be dominant and authoritarian in the narration. So, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* tries to explore the underlying fact of the Russian socio-cultural values and practices, exist as social norms, and seem to be unjustifiable to the main character.

Dostoevsky as the Fictional Writer

In December 1859, Dostoyevsky returned to Saint Petersburg where he ran a series of unsuccessful literary journals, *Time and Epoch*, with his older brother Mikhail. The former was shut down as a consequence of its coverage of the Polish Uprising. In that year, he traveled to Europe and frequently gambled in casinos. There, he met Apollinaria Suslova, the model for his proud women such as the two characters named Katerina Ivanovna in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

One after another, he was shocked by his wife's death in 1864 and his brother's death. He was financially crippled by business debts. Furthermore, he decided to assume the responsibility of his deceased brother's outstanding debts as well as providing for his wife's son from her earlier marriage and his brother's widow and children. He sank into a deep depression as frequently gambling in casinos. Such kinds of experiences can be seen in his artistic novel and short stories as the underlying theme of the literary creations.

He suffered from an acute gambling compulsion and its consequences. By one account, he completed *Crime and Punishment*, possibly his best known novel, in a mad hurry because he was in urgent need of an advance from his publisher. He had been left practically penniless after a gambling spree. Then, he wrote *The Gambler* simultaneously in order to satisfy an agreement with his publisher Stellovsky who, if he did not receive a new work, would have claimed the copyrights to all of his writings. He was extremely motivated by the dual wish to escape his creditors at home and to visit the casinos abroad. He traveled to Western Europe where he attempted to rekindle a love affair with Suslova, but she refused his marriage proposal. Dostoyevsky was heartbroken, but he soon met Anna Grigoreyna Snitkina, a twenty-year-old Stenographer. Shortly before marrying her in 1867, he dictated *The*

Gambler to her. From 1873 to 1881 he published the *Writer's Diary*, a monthly journal of short stories, sketches, and articles on current events. The journal was an enormous success. The rented apartment where he died and spent the last few years of his life is where he wrote his final novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. The apartment, situated in a building at 5 Kuznechnyi Pereulok, has been restored with old photographs to how it looked when he lived there. It opened in 1971 as the Dostoyevsky House Museum and is a popular tourist attraction in the city. As we observed his way of life how it is reflected in his novel recognizes him as the fictional writer not only in his era and Russian society but also beyond that.

Existentialism, influence and reality of the middle class and minorities remained as the major themes in his writing in which he frequently devote himself to contribute in the field of literary works as the fictional writer. With the publication of *Crime and Punishment* (1866) made Dostoyevsky one of Russia's most prominent authors throughout the history of literature. Will Durant in *The Pleasures Philosophy* (1953) call him one of the founding fathers of the philosophical movement known as existentialism that can be found in the work *Notes from Underground* that also appear as the influence philosophical term from European society.

For him, war is the people's rebellion against the idea that reason guides everything. Thus, reason is not the ultimate guiding principle for either history or mankind. It shows that this is the reflection of enlightenment period that influence. After his 1849 exile to the city of Omsk, Siberia, he focused heavily on the notions of suffering and peril in many of his works. Along with his experience of survival as the existentialism and issues of European enlightenment really keeps him as genuine philosopher can be easily seen in his works are the questions over the norms of Russian society. There are the marginal characters that questions on such norms can be studied from the new historicist perspectives that it contains its multitudes as

socio-cultural, political, economic and historical in order to blur the distinction of linearity of history.

Review of Literature in *Notes from Underground*

Dostoevsky's most controversial fictional work *Notes from Underground* received tremendous critical applause after its publication in 1864. The book is considered to be one of his most profound masterpieces whereas others argue against it for its undeveloped plot and ruthless comedy. Edward Wasiolek, in *Notes from Underground: Fyodor Dostoevsky*, holds, "Since Myshkin declined to give himself to the impoverished Russian middle class ideals, his turning up to delirium was inevitable; Myshkin's peril is the universal phenomenon of those cast away from society" (24). Here, Wasiolek deals with the character's real situation that moves around the Russian middle class society in which he remains critical and questions the social norms.

Indeed, in recent decades many critics have attempted to salvage the literary merits of *Notes from Underground*, arguing that as the fiction might be structurally deficient, it is also rich in esoteric spiritual and philosophical insights. More than anything else *Notes from Underground* rejects the requirements of a Genesis of normal mind of the character who remains critical to it fixation in the context of Russian society. Michael Foucault writes in his most celebrated and widely cited essay 'Truth and Power'.

We need, then, to locate the notion of discontinuity in its proper context. And perhaps there is another concept which is both more difficult and more central to your thought, the concept of an event. For in relation to the event a whole generation was long trapped in an impasse... a dichotomy was established between structures (the

thinkable), that which doesn't end cannot enter into the mechanism and the ply of analysis. (1136)

The citation encapsulates the basic ethos of socially detested issues in which Foucault has theorized and assimilated the pangs of being out cast on the struggle of the unnamed narrator in the *Notes from Underground*. It is a part of a notion of progress of industrialization and of ideological consolidation of the power of bourgeoisie in which the disabled character has to suffer and tremendous pain comes out of such social norms. So there is no fixed boundaries between the ability and disability, rather it is simply the social construction onwards which such characters have to suffer.

Furthermore, Lennard J. Davis claims in *The Disability Studies Reader*, "The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production" (26). David assumes that all the norms that they exist in the society are the symptoms of cultural construction out of which no one can escape from. It is more to the underprivileged group like Myshkin has to face peril out of which the questions come that there are no such fixed boundaries.

It tries to delve into the issues of social norms that are intrinsically rooted in the heart of socio-cultural construction of any society. The blames go to the natural disease and accident that tend to transform those characters in many societies. However, they are grounded on the basis of the social norms of the society that keeps those figures on the shadow. The given lines say:

The novel from, that proliferators of ideology, is intricately connected with concepts of the norms. from the typicality of the central character to normalizing devices of plot to bring deviant characters back into the norms of society to the normalizing coda of endings, the nineteenth and twentieth century novel promulgates and disburses notions of normalcy and extension makes of physical differences. Characters with

disabilities are always marked with ideological meaning, as are moments of disease or accident that transform such characters. (26)

It has always been societal tendencies to send different and unthinkable people to asylum or sanatorium because society itself is a construction of normalcy. They did not find the problems with socio-cultural construction as they appear as the norms in many society as a result of which they frequently suffer as what Foucault says, “a disciplinary society” (244). To clarify it, it would be better to recite the idea of Charles Larmore who quotes what Foucault says key aspect of disciplinary society. He observes, “Is the reversal of the political axis of individualization (192). Foucault emphasizes on the institutionalization of the individual whose identity remains in shadow and become the matter of questions within those characters can be seen in *Notes from Underground*.”

In feudal society, the power and privileged a person possesses, the more the person was regarded as individual. In modern disciplinary regimes however, “as power become more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strong individualized.” For example, “the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and not delinquent. (244)

In comparison to the previous society and circumstances, the representation of individual was more powerful than that of recent society lack. The power is more anonymous and more functional. The children were supposed to have individual qualities than that of adult. So are the cases on other issues such as patient and healthy man, madman and delinquent, normal and delinquent and able and disable ones. That means it tries to blur the distinction between the binaries, opposites and controversies. As it says, “Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* conveys bleak despair as

Dostoevsky provides as harsh indictment of the real world particulars of the Russian class of his day” (VI). In introduction to Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underworld* comes from editor that reads to penetrate over the character’s peril.

However, the intended research deals with the proposed topic and the criticisms are to illustrate how *Notes from Underworld* reflects issue of questioning the social norms as indispensable qualities in the existing Russian society that is from New Historicist cultural materialist and cultural critic point of view in order to study the protagonist practical life and upcoming consequences as one of new areas of research.

Introductory Notes on Theoretical Application

New historicism embodies to the situation of observing the literary text from historical nature of text and textual nature of the history. It overlaps contextually. It covers different dimensions of society that appears in any literary text can be regarded as the recent development of theoretical practices also share some of similarities and differences with the ideas of cultural materialism. It has also helped the work to interpret, analyze and understood differently. Then, it gives new space to observe the literary works that is purposively from socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical aspects.

It exists as the reaction to the historical development of the theoretical practices from reason based enlightenment, expressionism, neo-classicism, new criticism, and Russian formalism. On the other hand, it sees the contextual issues from cultural universalism to specific cultures. It mainly focuses on the issues of marginalized people and their cultures as ignored, dominated, misrepresented and underestimated ones.

Cultural materialism shares mode of practical criticisms that have some of the common themes of new historicism. It came as the defense to new historicism to treat

the literary text from Marxist ground. They view the cultural phenomenon as material values and practices and the socio-cultural relations occupy the power relations. It determines the issues of the culture in relations to matter-economic base structure and superstructure. It sees the issues of marginalized voices of communities that also resembles with new historicism that mean the issues of underprivileged, ignored, disadvantageous and misrepresented diverse voices of the contemporary society.

Cultural criticism reflects the situation of specific cultures of particular communities and encourages people to resist any other matter of cultural impact in society. It focuses on the issues of devalued and misinterpreted cultures. It instead of talking with universal or dominant culture, talks about the low, popular, ballet, opera, fine art, and popular pulp fiction culture. They all represent the voices of marginalized cultures. It goes beyond the statue-quo and deals with the issues of other cultures.

In these cases, new historicism and its multi facets exchange so many similarities and yet they have certain differences. Cultural criticism, cultural materialism appears as the Marxist school of criticism wherein Raymond Williams and Theodor Adorno stand as the founding father whereas new historicism posits as the American academic theoretical practices. The ways of dealing with the text is very similar. Thus, new historicism with its multi facets treats the literary work in term of historicity of the text and textuality of history in relation to socio-cultural, political, historical, and economic agendas.

Sums up the Thesis

This research paper has methodologically been divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the general introduction of the dissertation. It introduces the research along with the couple of examples from the text in order to prove hypothesis and brings the findings of researched thesis as new area of study. It also shapes Dostoevsky as a writer and his literary works, comments, views of other critics and

their criticism on him and his works, brief introduction of the theoretical modality on new historicism, cultural materialism and cultural criticism as the recent theoretical and practical perspectives. Thus, this chapter tries to critically observe, analyze, and present actual shape of introduction of thesis as complete findings of chapter one.

The second chapter briefly discusses on the methodological aspects of the researched paper in support to observe the research from new historicism, cultural materialism, and cultural criticism. Firstly, it, in brief, raises the issues of new historicism and interacts to conceptualize the ideas critically how new historicism departs from theoretical development of the history and historical development of the text in context. Secondly, it tries to show similarities and difference between new historicism and cultural materialism and the meaning and implication of these two relevant theory and practice. It also presents along with its ingredients, emerges, and motives of the critical perspectives of different critics. Further, it gives researcher's own understanding on those contexts and in own context, how it differs and resembles.

Thirdly, it shapes the meaning and importance of new historicism in relation to cultural criticism to observe the issues of history and culture or fact and fiction as overlapping disciplines how they come into existence. Finally, the issues and concepts of new historicism as theory and practice and the discussions on its relations with the theories and practices of cultural materialism and cultural criticism are concretized as the interrelated and interconnectedness of multi facets of new theoretical practices.

Based on the theoretical modality developed in the chapter two, third chapter studies Dostoevsky's work in relation to the character's numerous questioning to address his position in the Russian society to explain the middle class cultural values as the norms to continue the life. It also throws the light from the disabled character's interrogative lifestyles by blurring the distinction between the ability and disability.

Fourthly, the fourth chapter concludes this research paper based on the textual analysis of Dostoevsky's work *Notes from Underground* in chapter three and the theoretical modality of chapter two. Finally, the conclusion part appears and seems to be as sums of the observations, explanations and analysis based on overall understanding of the chapters on questioning the social Norms as challenges in the eyes of the protagonist.

II: New Historicism and its Multi Facets

Critical Notes on New Historicism

New historicism examines the historical nature of a literary text and the textual nature of history simultaneously. It also talks about the socio-cultural, political, historical, economic aspects in the text. This is the recent theoretical and practical movements of examining the literary text. In other words, new historicists try to show how literary texts are occupied in the power relations of their time, space and any coherent worldview but as active participants in the continual remaking of meaningful world from socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical dimensions.

Marxism observes socio-economic system as the ultimate source of our experience under which superstructure such as art and ideology are the manifestations of the material conditions or underlying structure. It, further, tries to understand the prevalent ideologies because of capitalistic social system in which great works of art can show ideologies as simply the reflection of them. History for Marxism is a matter of linear and casual relationship that basically focuses on the ideologies of ruling class whereas new historicism highlights on the issues of minorities in the history and text.

For instance, instead of reading history of Nepali armed conflict as true spirit of the time, new historicist would study political agenda and ideologies that represent the cultures of war occurrence as underlying phenomenon. The armed revolution brought the common people disabled which directly or indirectly questions on the social norms. There is no clear access to history. It sees how power circulates in all directions. In addition, the ruler does not possess power within self but allows it to circulate in various discourses: divine rights into religion vs. science or Darwinism. It suggests that discourses are a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place in which there should be interpretation regarding the facts. These kinds of subject matter can be easily found in Dostoevsky's *Notes from*

Underground. Thus, new historicists take history as a matter of interpretation not that of fact as underlying facts by questioning the social norms as Dostoevsky does in his society.

For Luis Montrose, the key concern of new historicism is: historicity of the text and textuality of history as he says, “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history” (410). All texts are embedded in specific social and cultural contexts, and all our knowledge and understanding of the past could only exist through the surviving textual traces of society that continually questions on the social norms.

Though there are some of the similarities, there are slightly differs Marxists perspectives from new historicist ones. Marxists be inclined to think of their critical practices as emancipator and liberating trends whereas new historicists revisit to the stories of oppressed in order to discover stories of the disable, sufferers and untouched as the effectiveness of the apparatus of oppression. Marxism seems to be utopian and new historicism sees the political import of power of the ignorance of the humanism. In *Notes from Underground*, we can see the presentation of the disabled character and his interrogative lifestyle in a way tie the relationship with new historicist perspectives to understand the text and the meaning of the phenomenon of Russian society of his time.

In addition, it is different from the traditional historian’s way of dealing with a history wherein they treat it as series of events which is also viewed from the higher positions. They have linear, casual relationships. For example, in linear or causal history, it goes in chronological way. It certainly presents the issues of upper-class people and majority voices of most of society. In other case, like opposite and unrelated events and texts are studied in terms of the strength of age of reason or enlightenment, and historical periods like Neo-classicalism, Romanticism or

Modernism and even Postmodernism. Unlike such reading, new historicism differs in its nature and feature to locate its position from marginal grounds. Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theories Today* presents, “traditional historian simply believed that history is progressive, that the human species is improving over a course of time, advancing in its moral, cultural, and technological accomplishments” (279). In contrary, new historicists put forward their argument that we have no clear access to any history. We see some facts or events of the history in which those facts, events and actions come within complex social issues along with competing ideologies and conflicting socio-political, cultural, economical, and historical agendas of the time and space and others depend on our understanding and interpretation. They strictly see history as a matter of interpretation of the history of text and text of history. In this response, Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* goes beyond the conventional understanding of the socio-cultural, political, economic and historical issues of his society as questioning the social norms from marginalized and disabled character.

Further, we narrate the issues of the history in relation to the past of famous king, knight, and warrior. The histories and historians also talk about those persons and their events and ideologies. However, new historicists raise the issues of them and their way of life in several ways. They also see the traditional way of writing history as form of presenting imaginative writing. In this sense, the past and written histories are not the same thing because we are directly unable to encounter with the past. We employ narrative as the medium to exchange in our communication in order to describe the history. Thus, we can observe the discipline of the history as a literary artifact that also produces knowledge of possibly aesthetic and other criteria to state the real episode of history of marginalized and disadvantageous in a meaningful way.

In this illustration, we can believe history as a descriptive prose as an output of literary standard of conventions and the historian’s imagination based on the facts

and events. The texts not only focus on a literary fact, but also talks about social facts or events. Moreover, it is fashioned within a context, which contains the life of authors, and the audience for whom s/he writes the background relationship of diverse socio-cultural, economic, historical, and political factors. The readers, thus, encompass the literary text, in circumstances, both in its production, reproduction by the writers and their response. Hans Bretons, in *Literary Theory: The Basis* reveals:

The literary text then is always past and parcel of a much wider cultural, political, social, and economic dispensation. ... Instead of transcending its own time and place, as traditional Anglo American criticism had argued, the literary is a time and place bound verbal construction that is always in one way or another political. Because it is inevitably involved with a discourse or an ideology, it cannot help being a vehicle power. (176-177)

It, then, highlights that any text is not just a written document that we go across for different purposes such as entertainment, knowledge, and meaning to the creativity. It addresses the wider socio-cultural, political, and economic distribution and issues of any society. So, most of the text remains in touch with certain sense of politics and has link with history. It services as a vehicle for power to the discourse and ideology that control over the literary or history of text on behalf of the marginalized, ignored character. In case of *Notes from Underground* also narrates the issues of social norms by questioning from interrogative expression of disabled character and his relations with society.

Additionally, the Anglo-American New Criticism focuses on independence of a text or they undo the text from that of its author unlikely to expressionist critics. The awareness of an authorial presence creates a gap between the readers and the text because it emphasizes on historical differences within the society because they

possess distinct cultural norms. They try to mock to the minorities. It posits the weight of the text's meaning in support of text itself rather new historicist go beyond such practices to locate the truth of the text and history in relation to the social context.

W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in their book *Literary Criticism: A short History* emphasize on the intentional and effective fallacies that stand as the departure for other critics. Their famous essays *The Intentional Fallacy* and *The Effective Fallacy* remained the theoretical basis as alternative way to positivistic scholarship whose concerns were neither of the present criticisms. In this reference, new critics treat the literary text as an object and autonomous body for their criticisms. They assume that it is essentially independent from its author and historical context. They focus on the textuality of a text. T.S. Eliot and I.A Richard initiated in these practices known as the new criticism. After that, it reproduces a number of chief American critics such as John Crow Ransom, Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks and Rene Wellek focus on the textuality of the text as an objective analysis of the text opposites to new historicist way of viewing the text or become the background to the initiation to new historicisms.

Unlike, the new critical and formalist way of dealing with the text, new historical approach of the criticism exists to provide the contextual meaning to the text. This school of criticism views a text through eyes of historical dimensions of the text and textual dimensions of history. There is an inseparable relationship between literature and history, and literature and culture. Nevertheless, it is virtually different from what is called the historical criticism of 1930s. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams describes:

New Historicism, since the early 1980s, has been the accepted name for a mode of literary study that its proponents oppose to the formalism. They attribute both to the new criticism and to the critical

deconstruction that followed it. . . ., new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its productions, its meanings, its effects, and of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. (182)

Here, onwards new historicist analysis of history and text, it is highly influenced by the historical context. It raises the issues of the socio-historical, political, cultural, and economic conditions and facts of many societies. As a proof, this has become the recent or the later critical interpretation of the text and the interpreters that they raise the subjects to analyze from new historicist's angles. The text could not be isolated from the social, political, cultural, and economic context to mean the text. Even the interpreters of a text have its historicity. Therefore, the new historicism emerges as the orientation to provide new space and scope in the field of interpretation and analysis of the text of the history and history of the text determine from outside factors. While treating *Notes from Underground*, it shares more to the socio-cultural, political and historical issues as questioning the social norms as the author reveals through the disabled character.

Furthermore, new historicists tend to identify a literary or non-literary text as situated within various institutions, social practices, and discourses as underlying norms to constitute overall cultures of the particular time framework and place. Amidst these social institutions, a literary text is not simply a product but also a producer of socio-cultural power that appear in the socio-cultural phenomenon of many societies:

Instead, new historicists conceive of a literary text as situated within the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the overall culture of a particular time and place with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and

codes, reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history. (183)

M.H Abrams focuses on the ideas of Louis Montrose to describe the new historicisms as inseparable relation of the history with texts and texts with history. History, for Louis Montrose, should not be taken as fixed objective facts or imaginative product within the text. But, it is imaginative product of the author and authorial intension alike a literature that needs to be interpreted, analyzed and explained from socio-cultural, economical, political and historical aspects as the text and textual aspects of history. It should ground on the minorities of the society and social norms. Abrams again says:

Conceived as discourse which although it may seem to present or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called representations- that is, verbal formations which are the “ideological products” or “cultural constructs” of the historical conditions specific to an era. New historicists often claim also that these cultural and ideological representations in text serve mainly to reproduce, confirm, and propagate the power structure of domination and subordination that characterize a given society. (183)

It shows that distinct criticisms contribute to mould the theoretic basis through such mode of criticism being in defense with cultural and ideological representations and constructions. In contrast, the text as history and literature represent the features of ideological products and cultural constructs of the historical conditions of specific era. New historicists believe on any kinds of cultural and ideological representations in the text, principally try to reproduce, verify, and circulate the power structure of subordination and domination that stands as the qualities of the particular society.

Among them, Louis Althusser, Mikhail Bakhtin, Clifford Geertz, Louis Montrose, Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn are prominent figures of new historicisms.

Therefore, new historicists talk about the issues of discourses of the particular era and place in the power relations, dialogic and socio-cultural aspects of different society. A critic Hans Bretons says that a new historicist reading of text explores the themes of the power relations and the forces, which operate in many cultures:

History, such as the socio-economic circumstances of a specific literary text's creation or biographical data regarding its author, is not read to illuminate literature, nor is literature read to shed a direct light on history. Rather the historical period in question is to see as a remote culture ...so that the power relations and the forces operating in that culture may be brought to light. (180)

The analysis of a literary text should be viewed as a set of social, economic, and political power relation in particular time and place contextually. However, new historicists are also aware of the facts that they are themselves entrapped into the web of power ruled ideologies and find difficulties to state the real history of past because of its complex social structure and power circulation.

As Foucault says, a fixed and single interpretation of any text is impossible because of the unstable and dynamic interplay of discourses that it occurs in the human society. They are always in a state of change, and overlapping each another. It is in fact discourses are permanent because of its dominance to each other. More truthfully, the relationship between individual identity and society is mutually constructive and purposive, "on the whole, human beings are never merely victims of an oppressive society, for they can find various ways to oppose authority in their personal and public lives" (281-82). At this temperament, a question strike into the mind of the individual, what kind of analysis can new historical literary critics try to

attempt? In this case, it deconstructs or challenges the ideologies or discourses of the power in the text from minority and subaltern voices. The ideologies may represent the society in the text or of the author imposed upon the text. It perhaps is the political ideology emphasized by state-controlled-media to the people of the country and society. So they blur the distinctions between the history and text, history and culture, or fact and fiction.

It tends to discover the events and phenomenon by focusing distinctly on historical narratives of marginalized voices is another dominant aspect. The way it possesses accurate version of history would no longer control our historical understanding between history and the text. In these concerns, new historicists try to promote the development and achievement of the histories of marginalized peoples. In contrary to chronological history reading, new historicists challenge to address other people or voiceless communities and their socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical nature of text and textual nature of history. The new historicist critics depict the plurality of voices is another dominant feature of new historicisms. Distinct cultural productions exist that also give meaning to the relevance and appropriateness of the theoretical modality of new historicist as it contains multi facets.

Foucault believes that human beings have made history subjective. People are the subject of the history for it records the activities of the people in the time. There is no such universal understanding beyond history and society. He argues, "In our culture, human beings are made subject. In this process of social objectification and categorization, human beings are given both a social and personal identity" (8). According to Foucault, it is the cultural construct due to which human beings are subjective. The social process tags personal and social identity in the process of objectification and categorization. In the *Notes from Underground*, character is being interwoven within the social process of its objectified and categorized form of disable

and the source of amusement towards which he often questions about the social norms.

Therefore, they prefer an analysis of a text which charms to light the dominant social-cultural, political and historical orders that the text is instrument of, and the challenges from inside to the orders, it seeks to hide. Such critics are known as cultural materialists. The searcher tends to bring some of context of the cultural materialism how that differs from the new historicist perspective also come as the supplementary part to judge *Notes from Underground* in meaningful and purposive ways.

Cultural Materialism

Arnold's notion of High culture in terms with great tradition of the Age of Europe, and Eurocentric notion of culture initiate the debate in the field of cultural criticism and materialism. They come across the distinct notions to state the issues and concerns of cultural materialism. F. R. Leavis took it in the context of the advent of machines, mass culture and its economy based commercial value, competition and wealth. Leavis advocated organic community with harmonious social human values, and cooperation as the ruling principal of society. Raymond Williams and Simon Hoggart accepted the value of canonical text but such texts tend to ignore the communal forms of life. Raymond Williams took the idea of hegemony from Gramsci. It is difficult for the society to move beyond it. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield sought to emphasize analytical rather than evaluative sense of the term culture. Whatsoever they have opinioned that tries to deal with the problem and challenges of cultural materialism in the domain of cultural materialism to see culture from the mater relationship.

For them, culture is material in a sense that could not transcend the material forces and relations of production. They remained critical on the vulgar Marxist reading of

culture as a reflection of the economic and political system. They also insisted that it could not be independent of its pressures either way. The issues of Agency and dissident as transgression for Sinfield, alternative, subversive readings are of central importance to cultural materialism. Althusser's concept of Ideology is different from that of others in which he classifies the means of ideology even in other areas and groups of any society as pervasive phenomena.

Cultural materialism came into existence in the mid-1980s along with new historicism as theoretical movement and a mode of criticisms. A British Neo-Marxist critic Raymond Williams has contributed this term in literary criticism in his book *Marxism and Literature* in 1977. Onwards, several of critics and scholars accepted this term to indicate the Marxist orientation of their mode of cultural materialism. Unlike, Marxist critics view cultural phenomenon as a superstructure which is determined by the economic base as they believe, cultural materialist seek to draw attention to the processes being employed by contemporary power structures, such as the church, the state or the academy, to disseminate discourses of ideology. To do this, they explore text's historical context and its political implications, one after other by close textual analysis. That also posits the dominant hegemonic position.

Further, cultural materialism is a theoretical paradigm that focuses on the empirical study of socio-cultural systems within a materialistic infrastructure-structure-superstructure framework. Marvin Harris terms it in the field of anthropological studies in his text, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968). He says the aim of this theory is "to create a pan-human science of society where findings can be accepted on logical and evidentiary grounds by the pan-human community" (xii). In this regards, he sees the fruitful result of the human society based on the logical and evident grounds. It has its relations with that of material values in the society which could not be disassociated with the mater of the society.

As cultural materialist theory tries to express, production and reproduction dominate and determine the other sectors of cultures. Therefore, cultural materialist see things like government, religion, law and kinship as constructs and has association with the material aspects. Marxists critics assume, “Cultural materialism explains the structural features of a society in terms of production within the infrastructure only” (277). Nevertheless, Marxists critics argue that production is material condition located in the base that acts upon by the infrastructure. “Unlike Marxism, cultural materialism addresses relations of unequal power recognizing innovations and changes that benefits both upper and lower classes” (278). Marxism treats all cultural changes as being beneficial only to the ruling class and their way of living standard in relation to matter whereas the cultural materialists consider it as structural features of a society in regards to production, reproduction and refinement associate with that of infrastructure.

The new historicism and cultural materialism posit their distinct qualities though they are very much-interrelated terms to justify the text from new perspectives hoping to understand the meaning of the text. The major assumptions that the new historicists and cultural materialists have, as Hans Bretons states:

First of all, subject cannot transcend their own time but live and work within the horizon of a cultural constructed by ideology, by discourses. The ideological constructions that authors live in, and have internalized, inevitablized, inevitably become part of their work, which is therefore always political and always a vehicle for power. (185)

Both as new historicism and cultural materialism try to define the ideology and its existing social horizon and to adjust in new circumstances. The totality of the ideological network covers everything and everywhere. It always hegemonizes the mind of the people. The producer (the author) and the product (text) are influenced by

other texts: religious, political, economic, legal, and cultural ones. Therefore, a text could not be analyzed, interpreted and seen in isolation irrespective of those non-literary texts as part of the task of new historicist and cultural materialism.

Therefore, both new historicists and cultural materialists are fascinated in recovering lost histories and exploring mechanisms of repression and subjugation, production and reproduction. The major difference is that new historicists tend to concentrate on those at the top of the social hierarchy while cultural materialists ponder on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy are the distinctive features that they share. In the text, we can see the influence and impact of both the practices in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. The main character exist as margin, amusing and subaltern character who sees the difficulties, challenges and painful experiences in the social norms of Russian society in which he questions to present his position has been highly dominated by such top social and bottom social hierarchy can be easily viewed through the light of new historicist and cultural materialist practices.

Cultural Criticism

Culture is, originally, the cultivation of organic material, later, by extension and analogy, the cultivation of human beings. In the humanities, it tends to denote the arts in the social sciences as the form of the way of life of a people. The two sets of meaning are connectable through the notion that the former express the latter. More generally, the word suggests to the entire range of institutions, artifacts and practices that make up our symbolic universe. It tries to include art and religion, science and sport, education and leisure, but not normally economics and politics.

In this sense, culture is understated rules by which we live, rules that regulate our everyday practices and activities without our thinking about them or noticing them. Culture becomes visible when we travel between cultures. Culture can be understood as what maintains civility in communities is necessary because nature

propels humans toward physical survival in ways that can lead to violence, dominations and injustices occur. Nevertheless a cultural study has a moral, ethical and political dimension to the degree that it takes stock of that reality.

Speaking ahead, cultural criticism is an analytical approach to begin the discussion, debate and issues of cultures of minorities, which begins during mid-1960s. Cultural criticism focuses on to identify what other criticisms have misunderstood and undervalued the working-class cultures and the daily life of such class. Lois Tyson also mentions that “the dominant class dictates what forms of art are to be considered ‘high’ culture, such as the ballet, the opera, and ‘fine’ art. Forms of popular culture, on the other hand- such as television, situational comedies, popular music, and ‘pulp’ fiction- have been relegated to the status of ‘low’ culture” (293). Cultural criticism distinguishes the so-called hierarchy of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures. It also tries to analyze a text on the ground of cultural activities that they perform.

In contrary, cultural studies play significant role of cultural production in the circulation of power. Such production is interwoven around cultural production in the circulation of power. It covers with that of cultural production from cultural celebration through rituals, publication of books, cultural dance show, opera, and almost all social activities even publicly giving speech could be included in it as means of analytical, interpretative and critical framework. Though they have distinctive differences, cultural criticism and new historicism openly exchange similar theoretical ground reality. Tyson in *Cultural Theory Today* adds:

Cultural criticism shares with new historicism the view that human history and culture construct only a partial, subjective picture. Both fields share the belief that individual human subjectivity develops in a give-and take relationship with its cultural milieu: while we are constrained within the limits set for us by our culture, we may struggle

against those limits or transform them. And both fields are interdisciplinary, for both argue that human experience, which is the stuff of human history and culture, cannot be adequately understood by means of academic discipline that curve it up into such artificially separated categories as sociology, psychology, literature and so forth.(292-93).

In broader sense, cultural criticism is often used to refer to any kind of analysis of any aspect of cultures. Some criticisms like Marxist, Feminist, Lesbian, Gay, Queer, contact zone, cultural ambivalence are the part of cultural criticism because they provide some aspects of the culture of a particular time and place. It seems to be less politically guided than new historicism in its support of oppressed class do. Because of its less political orientation, cultural criticism often constitute on Marxist, feminist and other political theories in performing its analysis and interpretative discourses. It has become common phenomenon that cultural criticism has taken interest in popular cultures and other cultural performance.

In further case, another important difference between political theory and cultural criticism can be seen while analyzing the operations of working class people. It glances towards the oppressed people as both from victim and resistance. “rather, like new historicism, cultural criticism view oppressed people as both victimized by the dominant power structure and capable of resisting or transforming that power structure” (294). Therefore, we can observe connection between a literary text and the culture in which the situation of emergence and interpretation come together. It attempt to examine both high and low culture, and tries to map the changing ideological functions that a given cultural production performs. Additionally, Tyson raises some questions to make clear the approaches to literary analysis employed by new historical and cultural critics:

How does the literary text function as part of a continuum with other historical/cultural text from the same period...? What do these literary works add to our tentative understanding of human experience in that particular time and place, including the way in which individual identities shape and are shaped by cultural institutions? How can we use literary work to 'map' the interplay of both traditional and subversive discourses circularity in the culture in which that work emerged and/or the culture in which the work has been interplayed? How does the text promote ideologies that support or undermine the prevailing power structure of the time and place in which it was written and/or interpreted? " (297-98)

These lines question how literary text represents the progressive functions of historical and cultural text from particular historical periods. There are different cultural institutions that shape individual identities. It also reflects our tentative understanding of human experience of specific time and space. It describes literary work based on the traditional and subversive discourses that come in the form of circles in many cultures. Text is written and interpreted being influenced by cultural circumstances that remain within the prevailing power structure of the time and space. So, the literary text is the interplay of cultures and circulatory discourses in which the identity of individuals could not escape from historical and cultural facts. In *Notes from Underground*, we can observe such kinds of traits in which the main character could not escape from historical and cultural facts rather than questions of social norms.

Cultural studies embody to provide a focal point for interdisciplinary scope and implication in its nature and features. For the study of literature, it has challenged the idea of a canonical one. Though it was developed in Britain as a reaction against

specific disciplinary and political position, it tries to cover the most important features of understanding of these are Liberal Humanism, critique of Orthodox Marxism, and links with the New Left, Mass Society Focus and Media Communication from the marginalized, underprivileged and below levels. Dostoevsky's portrait of the disabled character and his position in his society are the vivid examples of understanding the text from below level that comes under the rubric of cultural studies. Cultural criticism takes ideas put forward by Frankfurt School, Raymond Williams, Althusser, Gramsci, Roland Barthes, and Foucault among many others to support these kinds of theoretical practice which in either way exchanges ideas with that of new historicism.

So far as new historicism tries to deal with the circulating power as entrapment model even attempts to challenge the system help to maintain it differently. For new historicism along with Althusser's model is about digging deeper into power play of society from the top hierarchy of society. But for cultural materialism, it was a way of theorizing the power of dominant ideologies basically deals with down hierarchy of the society. It gives the reverse signification in which the ruling people want to impose certain means of power circulation over rest of the minority's voices. Furthermore, cultural studies underpin the issues of minority's cultural norms more initiative to daily activities and performance of the common people and their voices as an academic as well as institutional practices consisting both victim and resistance in order to come up along with their attempt to survive in the world. Here, the main character easily shares the themes of resistance and victim. On the one hand, he is victim in his society as a result of social norms, which on the other side, also forces him to resist due to which he frequently questions on such norms. Thus, cultural studies become also part of the theoretical modality in order to deal with Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.

Taking these questions in consideration, questioning the social norms in *Notes from Underground* is analyzed how the literary text share in the circulation of discourses, shaping and shaped by the cultures in which it emerges and by the cultures in which they are interpreted is the new historicisms with its multi facets. It also plunges into the socio-political, socio-intellectual socio-economic situations of those who have prepared different comments on the work. The commentators are boundless of their own bias understanding of the text. They are rooted in their own beliefs and interests. They might have faith on certain religious, cultural, racial, or intellectual beliefs wherein the underlying meaning of the text lies. Beyond these issues, it also possesses the presentation of the character as a marginalized and underprivileged one. The concept of new historicist distinguishes the boundaries of ideological and marginalized voices how they blend in a literary text in the form of history and culture, literature and history, culture and literature, science and philosophy or ability and disability in regards to questioning the social norms in *Notes from Underground*.

Since the most of the dominant ideological blends are in favor of the powerful class, new historicism and its multi facets problematize those blends of ideologies and challenges by taking side of marginalized groups. In this sense, *Notes from Underground* is a blend of powerful challenges over the ideologies of the power in special reference to questioning the social norms. Thus, these three recent theoretical development have been shaped uniting them in above theoretical modality as multi facets is to address the real problems and challenges of the narrator how he undergoes in several ways can seriously become the parts of observation, analysis and interpretation in the following chapter.

III: Questioning the Social Norms as Overcoming with Problems

Questioning the Social Norms in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*

Dostoevsky's fictional and non-fictional creations vividly shares the prevailing social norms of the 19th century in which he frequently questions through the imaginative disabled character with imaginative story in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.

There was in politics great influences of European revolutionary movement as a result of which Russian society moulds the social norms which could not do justice to its victims. That part is shown through the main character's resistance. In this case, the idea of Althusser helps us to understand how he become victims and resist towards the social norms. There were other philosophical ideologies of Europe such as renaissance, romanticism, enlightenment and existentialism got spread and influenced the Russian society that later turned into social norms.

Another feature of Russian society is the revolutionary movement a late-19th century Russian native's ideology closely aligned with Stallion's socialist movement. Dostoevsky clearly observes and even participate in such activities during his time. He sees no place for those disabled and victims of wars and even post-wars Russian society that can be vividly seen in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* are the results of socio-cultural, historical and political agendas. The main character's relationships between and among the characters are shown with agony, troubles, hatred, and separation that also closely depict the pictures of his Russian society, come within the spree of the questions on such social norms.

Dostoevsky's characterization, depiction of complex situations such as existential themes of spiritual torment, religious awakening, and the psychological disorder, social outbreaks are central concerns and agendas can be frequently found in his works. They are shown as caused by the conflict between traditional Russian

culture and the influx of modern of Western philosophy becomes another motif that we see in his writings. This also helps to understand his *Notes from Underground* from socio-cultural and political agenda of his time.

The protagonist who seems to be antagonist in the novel narrates by questioning the social norms which really identifies him as the common human being. He is taken as the weak and defeated man of having the psychological pitfall. However, it does not seem to be so and can be understood through the modes of description. There are socio-political causes behind the protagonist's questioning on the social norms. On the one hand, there were the wounds of wars had not completely recovered. On the other, Russian society was entering into the internal as well as cold war experiences. So, they were the striking point of Dostoevsky's era of the 1860s.

There was the dominance of Western Europe, immersing himself in the European culture that he believed was encroaching on Russia that are the issues he explores in *Notes from Underground*. in an account of his biography shows that those years in Europe were a difficult time for Dostoevsky, as he struggled with poverty, epilepsy, and an addiction to gambling. People were isolated and alienated due to the remains of the effects of the world wars and post-wars that we see in *Notes from Underground*. Thus, the author and his presentation of the characters in the novel share some of the qualities, features and themes regarding the questions on the social norms of his context.

As we have developed the theoretical modalities in the research in order to support the textual analysis, new historicism and its multi facets observes the historical nature of *Notes from Underground* and the textual nature of history reciprocally. The socio-cultural, political, historical, economic aspects of the text easily provide a background to the historical setting and presentation of the characters to reflect the ways of the people of Russian Society during his time. In other words,

Foucault as the pre-dater of new historicists try to show how literary texts are centered in the power relations of their time, space out which we can measure the socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical dimensions. The characters in such dimensions want to overcome by questioning on the social norms through the voices of protagonist and antagonist as they are exposed in *Notes from Underground*. We can understand the position and argument of the characters by knowing the detailed description in which they are fully tied with the political agenda of Russian civilization. Due to the political turmoil and wars hit circumstances, people lose so many things that are addressed through the characters. In this regards, character's way of questioning the social norms are the output of an attempt to overlap the issues of opposites that they frequently occur in *Notes from Underground*.

The character frequently asks a question on his position that underpins the socio-cultural construction also tries to explain the middle class cultural values in Russian society as the norms to continue the life. In contrary, there exists discontinuity is also the part of new way of dealing with the text to address the meaning of the phenomenon. We can find such kinds of features as the given lines clearly say:

Oh what a pure innocent child! To begin with, when in all these thousands of years have men acted solely in their own interests? What about all those millions of incidents testifying to the fact that men have knowingly . . . but willfully and obstinately preferred to pursue a perverse and difficult path, almost lost in the darkness? This shows that obstinacy and self-will meant more to them than any kind of advantage. (29)

The narrator does have much critical human interests on the formation of the history as the linearity of the history where they simply search for their own advantages.

Others are in darkness. In other cases, the narrator is presented as abnormal and unlike protagonist in nature simply reflects the questions on the existing norms of Russian society. He is much critical on the advantage and progress and rather states it as more obstinacy for human beings though they claim as great achievements and changes in field of humanity. That is to say, the narrator's questions regarded the norms of Russian society tries to prove to the sufficient background in which he is able to understand the world as nothing than the misrepresentations of the social norms. It really helps us to blur the distinction between the ability and disability, normal and abnormal, advanced and primitive which can be seen through the eyes of narrator. Further, he questions:

. . . Advantages! What is advantage? Besides, can you undertake to define exactly where a man's advantage lies? What if it sometimes so happens that a man's advantage not only may but must consist in desiring in certain cases not what is good but what is bad for him? And if so, if such cases are even possible, the whole rule is utterly destroyed. Do you think such cases occur? You laugh; laugh, then gentleman, but answer me this: can man's interests be correctly calculated? Are there not some which not only have not been classified, but are incapable of classification? (29-30)

In this regards, he even surprises on the word advantages and asks where man's advantage lies. He does not see any rules exist and there is no real measure of man's interests can be correctly calculated and classified. In fact, they are incapable to classify them. Thus, he is able to question on the norms of Russian middle class society where he sees everything blurs the distinctions and remains within the periphery of questions.

The questions of the validity on such norms are the clearly reflected in the novel by highlighting from the disabled character's interrogative lifestyles. It explicitly appears as the contrary to the social norms thereby blurring the distinction between the ability and disability. There is nothing impossible in the world and everything is constructed out of its opposites. In the minds of society, he is disabled. But for him he is able to interpret his society. His ways of questioning on the social norms also proves that he is normal, able and dynamic character. As he narrates:

Impossibility is a stone wall. What do you mean by stone wall? . . .

This point is to understand everything, to realize everything, everything, every impossibility, and every stone wall; not to reconcile yourself to a single one of the impossibilities and stone walls if the thought of reconciliation sickens you (23).

He seems to be very much logical in his argument. Through his way of presentation, he is able and wise enough to guide his drive. He uses the law of nature or the conclusions of the natural sciences or of mathematics. In a literal sense, he is unable to break the wall because he is physically defeated but he does not see the things are impossible to him. The walls represent the social norms that have made him unable to do so. Then, the social norms and unpleasant realities of the past have become for him the stone wall is simply the matter of questions.

So far as this research intends to interpret and analyze the characters practical way of life and upcoming consequences by questioning of the norms of Russian society of era were highly socio-political agenda. The major tasks of new-historicist and cultural materialist reading of the text move around such socio-political agenda out of which the character remains engaged. Beyond this, new historicist tries to cover more disciplines in which the characters consciously engage. It is through the idea of

Foucault that matches with the way of the presentation of the main character. The given lines say:

I am even more convinced that this suspicion, so to speak, of mine is true by the fact that if one takes the antithesis of the normal man, for example, the man of heightened awareness, who has of course emerged not from the womb of Nature but from a test-tube (this is almost mysticism, but that is thing I distrust too) – the test-tube man will sometimes give up so completely when confronted by his sharpened consciousness, as a mouse, not a man. A highly conscious mouse, but all the same a mouse, while the other is a man, and consequently . . . and so on. (21)

The narrator claims that the normal man is stupid as he is accepted in the society. To support his idea, he brings antithesis to the normal man to erasure the underlying structure of normal and abnormal, wise and stupid, able and disable where he compares the nature born man and the test-tube. For what he regards as highly conscious mouse not that of man. It also vividly distinguishes the situation of the scientific development and of people's space and position materially dominated can be seen through the imaginative characters. They as a whole reflect the Russian middle class society and its norms.

Further, it also describes protagonist's dynamic relations in the changing context of the complex global cultures and material rationality of the very culture. In fact, he finds no such fundamental changes in his society of his time where he lives. It shows clear examples of linear and circular or dynamic histories that could hardly redraw the historical boundaries of socio-political and socio-economic aspects and appear as the social norms. He sees himself in margins out of which he simply questions about the norms of the Russian society. The character questions on such

norms which is culturally, politically and economically constructed. They are unable to solve the problems of his communities. He is very much aware of the facts in which he comes up with logically and mathematically. The given lines say, “at least, man has always feared this $2 \times 2=4$ formula and I still fear it” (40). Despite being socially marginalized and underprivileged, he seems to be very much conscious on different disciplines through which he is able to ridicule his society.

The society amuses and entertains to the main character. In contrary, he consciously mocks and amuses his society. His innocent childlike situation and belief on the conventionality cannot do anything. Rather they emerge as the piles of the questions to inform the existing social norms during his period in Russia society. The given line says, “I was always conscious of many elements showing the directly opposite tendency” (16). He presents the material relations of his cultural norms in which he frequently questions. That means he is not satisfied with his cultural norms of what he calls elements. Cultural materialist critics such as Williams and Adorno’s concepts of material rationality as he compares culture with that of elements become fruitful way to interpret and analyze the lines of the text. By means of several attempts, he tends to achieve heaven on earth did not match with the Russian middle class norms. That is to say, this research will focus on the disabled character’s interrogative lifestyle and the frequent questioning on such norms give the uniting relationship of impossibility of the ability and disability binaries that also matches with the proposed title of the intended thesis.

Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* basically deals with queries of the unnamed narrator who is antagonistic in tone remains busy on questioning the existing sense of morality and builds the foundations of rational thinking. There are clearly stated two tendencies of same society that they share the contradictions. In the text, the narrator describes himself derisively referring to himself as an overly

conscious intellectual, an epileptic and a delirious man, the character upon whom the Russian society focuses with amusement. So he is not satisfied with the idea of intellectual activity as he assumes it as the disease of the society. The line reveals, “Why do I say that, though? Everybody does it – we all show off with our diseases . . . but every kind, of intellectual activity is a disease” (18). He wants to cooperate with Russian middle class values and practices. He, in greater sense, notes all these social conventions as the pitfall of his society. They come as the piles of questions regarding the social norms have to do greater changes in the psychology of the main character. Anyway, he raises the questions on behalf of the norms possibly a failure to achieve the heaven on earth as a result of which he is isolated, distorted and separated from the majorities of Russian society. That also keeps him in marginalized position:

How am I, for example, to be sure of myself? Where are my foundations? Where am I to take them from? I practice thinking, and consequently each of my primary causes pulls along another, even more primary, in its wake, and so on ad infinitum. That is really the essence of all thinking and self-awareness, perhaps this; once again, is a law of nature. And what, finally, is the result. (27)

Here, the character wants to state his origin in which he comes to self-awareness that is the law of nature. He is very much practical. But he is regarded as antagonist in the society. He has the knowledge of several disciplines and acts consciously to ask the questions on the social norms one after another. Therefore, regarding the hypothesis, the character’s comment on the Russian social norms and questions on them explicitly reflects the situation of his dissatisfaction and problems blur the distinction of the opposites of ability and disability can be viewed through the nature and manner of the main character.

Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* plays an important role in the development of realist fiction by depicting the social norms of the Russian society being highly critical. The novel also explains the mind of an individual on the margins of modern society and examines the effects of modern life along with that man's personality. In this instance, one of cultural critics, Luis Tyson's ideas regarding the social institutions that shape individual identity give the meaning to the text. The protagonist is a low-ranking civil servant in 1860s St. Petersburg who has gradually gone mad over a lifetime of inability to cope with the over loaded social norms that centers around him. The protagonist presented as the Underground Man is an anti-hero, the kind of downtrodden, indecisive victim of his society that Dostoevsky would continue to explore in his works along with *Notes from Underground*. We can see these kinds of expression in the lines of the novel as it clearly indicates, . . . really is not interesting; a novel needs hero, but here all the features of an anti-hero have purposely been collected, and most of all, the whole thing produces a bad impression, because we have all got out of the habit of living, we are all in a greater or less degree crippled. (122)

It also gives biographical description of the author during his prison time in Siberia. However, Dostoevsky learns that the peasants and undereducated workers of Russia associated progressive thinkers with the upper classes that oppress them and limit their freedom. He decides that the theorists of the 1860s were too absorbed in European culture and too far removed from inherently Russian values and practices. Dostoevsky starts believing on the way to create harmony among all Russian people was through a return to traditional Russian values and practices such as personal responsibility, religion, brotherly love, and the family relations. He also realizes that theories that seek universal social laws to explain and govern human behavior ignore the fundamental individuality of the human soul, the complexity of human personality

and the power of free will they come in daily life as a part of cultures in which he made several questions. It starts losing such social norms as a result of socio-political, cultural and economic background is expressed through the characters and their relationship each other. In a way, it questions on the civilization. The given lines also support:

And what softening effect has civilization had on us? Civilization develops in man only a many-sided sensitivity to sensations, and . . . definitely nothing more. And through the development of that many-sidedness man may perhaps progress to the point where he finds pleasure in blood. In fact, it has already happened. Have you noticed that the most refined shedders of blood have been almost always the most highly civilized gentlemen, to whom all the various Attilas and Stenka Razins could not have held a candle? (31)

It reveals the fact on the Russian society of Dostoevsky's period. This civilization has nothing to do with the characters in the novel. So it is through the new historicist interpretation that the text can provide multiple meaning of Russian society towards which the main character critically questions on the social norms. The main character in *Notes from Underground* is both a mouthpiece for Dostoevsky's ideas and examples of the various problems that modern Russian society has inevitably produced and moved around. Like Dostoevsky, the main character is critical of rational egoism and other dangerously totalitarian visions of utopia. He is extremely critical of dogmatism of any kind. At the same time, he is a victim of the modern Russian urban experience. Deprived of positive social interactions, the main character as Underground Man tries to relate to the world according to the codes and examples he finds analogous to the European literature. The failure of these attempts makes him

even more bitter and isolated, driving him deeper underground to be critical about the civilization as whole.

The anonymous narrator of *Notes from Underground* is a bitter, misanthropic man living alone in St. Petersburg, Russia, in the 1860s. He is a veteran of the Russian civil service who has recently been able to retire because he has inherited some money. The novel consists of the notes that the man writes, a confused and often contradictory set of memoirs or confessions describing and explaining his alienation from modern society. How it helps us to know about the narrator as the isolated character asks questions on such norms are the effects and influences of certain Russian social norms. The below mentioned lines add:

What does it matter to me that kind of building is impossible, and that tone must content oneself with blocks of flats? Why was I made with such desires? Can I have been made for only one thing, to come at last to the conclusion that my whole make-up is nothing but a cheat? Is that the whole aim? I do not believe it. Do you know one thing, though? I am certainly the underground people like me must be kept in check. Though we may be capable of sitting underground for forty years without saying word, if we do come out into the world and burst out, we will talk and talk and talk . . .(43)

Through these lines, we can realize that there is nothing impossible. The ways he makes desires cannot do anything rather it postpones the questions regarding the social norms. He could not fulfill his aim which becomes fruitless and finds cheating to himself. he is in a several ways cheated that is due to the social norms which just keeps him isolated and dominated as he assumes himself as the Underworld Man. Everything burst out as the questions regarding the social norms are the dismay and

dissatisfaction of the main character can be easily understood from the new historicist perspective along with the themes of cultural materialism and cultural criticism.

As we go through the historical background of Russian society, it shares certain socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic factors or agendas come as social norms. In this case, the main character notes and questions continually on such social norms, so the plot of the text, *Notes from Underground* is divided into two sections. The first, *Underground Man* is shorter and set in the 1860s, when he is forty years old. This section serves as an introduction to the character of the underground man explaining his theories about his antagonistic position toward society. This is through the new historicist view that helps us to understand the opposite relations of protagonist and antagonist reciprocally. In the eyes of the main character, the whole society is antagonist whereas for society, he is marginal and deprived of his position. This line helps to know about the characters, “now I ask you, what can one expect of man, as a creature endowed with such strange qualities?” (5). He brings the example of man to have the experience of sublimity can be understood as the strange qualities are to cover with the opposites. Such opposites can be understood from the new historicist angle.

The first words we hear from the Underground Man tell us that he is “a sick man . . . a wicked man . . . an unattractive man” (1) whose self-loathing and spite has crippled and corrupted him. He is a well-read and highly intelligent man, and he believes that this fact accounts for his misery. The Underground Man explains that, in modern society, all conscious and educated men should be as miserable as he is. He has become disillusioned with all philosophy. He has appreciation for the sublime, Romantic idea of “the beautiful and lofty” but he is aware of its absurdity in the context of his narrow, mundane existence (72). Behind such things, we have to try our best to find out the most striking point to have his position are the society and its

norms in which he lives on. That is the part of new historicist reading the text and character through the socio-political agenda of his society and reflection of the social norms.

The Underground Man has great contempt for nineteenth century utilitarianism, a school of thought that attempts to use mathematical formulas and logical proofs to align man's desires with his best interests. The Underground Man complains that man's primary desire is to exercise his free will, whether or not it is in his best interests. In the face of utilitarianism, man will do nasty and unproductive things simply to prove that his free will is unpredictable and therefore completely free. This assertion partially explains the Underground Man's insistence that he takes pleasure in his own toothaches or liver pains. Such pleasure in pain is a way of spiting the comfortable predictability of life in modern society, which accepts without question the value of going to the doctor. The Underground Man is not proud of all this useless behavior. However, he has enormous contempt for himself as a human being. He is aware that he is so overcome by inertia that he cannot even become wicked enough to be a scoundrel, or insignificant enough to be an insect, or lazy enough to be a true lazybones. But the society really sidelines him as a result of which he frequently questions on the norms of society where he struggles to survive with great difficulties and problems.

Nineteenth century's utilitarian means of practice has not only concerned with that of utilitarianism-maximum satisfaction to majority of people but it can be interpreted from the material values subvert the ideology of utilitarianism through the cultural materialism. This philosophy indicates the clear shift from European society to Russian one that implants the life of author. In production and reproduction relation, the investors and promoters are in search of profit. They even consider human emotions and beauty as matter to be amused and entertained. They perceive

through the material rationality. So cultural materialism, moreover, justifies to the text in order to find out the real intension of the author. The given lines say, listen! I shouted. ‘Here is money, you see, here it! (111). What matters in this world is the money after which the people frequently run even by doing careless act on human emotions, beauty and marriage are compared with the matter and the material concerns could not justify the life of the main character in text.

Furthermore, the second fragment of *Notes from Underground*, entitled “Apropos of the Wet Snow” describes specific events in the Underground Man’s life of the 1840s, when he was twenty-four years old. In a true sense, this section occurs as a practical figure of the more abstract ideas of the main character that resembles to the life of author himself. This second section reveals the narrator’s progression from his youthful perspective, influenced by Romanticism and ideals of “the beautiful and lofty” (72) to his mature perspective in 1860, which is purely cynical about beauty, loftiness, and literariness. According to cultural material critics Raymond Williams sees romantic ideology as the false consciousness of idyllic past. There are certain material concerns in the minds of industry holders who occupy the majority of the land to establish factories and industries have not concerned with that of emotion, beauty and loftiness is simply the matter of earning profit goes beyond the sense of humanity. Thus, cultural materialism suits to analyze the text in meaningful way as far as possible.

By means of its extension, “Apropos of the Wet Snow” describes interactions between the Underground Man and various characters that inhabit the world as soldiers, former schoolmates, and prostitutes. They are either way represent the margins. So is the case in him. There are different relations as he develops during his contacts among them. He is shown as much more alienated and separated from these characters. He even could not have normal interaction with them. He treats them with

a mixture of disgust and fear. That results in his effacement or humiliation which also in turn comes as form of remorse and self-loathing. This is the causes by means of socio-political agenda of Russian society and their transformations into material rationality have kept the character more isolated and loathing or matter oriented consequently deals with the questioning the social norms of Russian society of his time and space.

The Underground Man's alienation manifests itself in all kinds of relationships. When walking in the park, he obsesses about whether to yield the right of way to a soldier whom he does not even know. Then, in a confused attempt at social interaction, he deliberately follows some school acquaintances to a dinner where he is not wanted, alternately insulting them openly and craving their attention and friendship. Later that same evening, he attempts to rescue an attractive young prostitute named Liza by delivering impassioned, sentimental speeches about the terrible fate that awaits her if she continues to sell her body. Such kinds of relations have made possible as the capitalist society developed in the later phase of Europe that has direct or indirect influence and impact in Dostoevsky's time and space as a result of which he tries to show the characters, their relationship and overall circumstances in such highly material domination that is possible to see through the cultural materialism to interpret and judge Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* in order to create the meaning of the phenomenon.

Further instances help us to support the nature and manner of the main character as it reveals. When Liza comes to visit the Underground Man in his shoddy apartment several days later, he reacts with shame and anger. He realizes that she has reason to pity or look down upon him. The Underground Man continues to insult Liza throughout her visit. Hurt and confused, she leaves him alone in his apartment. There

is break in sense of family relation and marriage which are the part of cultural studies that we can find sufficient reason in the text. The aforementioned lines show:

The terrified and outraged feeling in her face was changed first of all into sorrowful bewilderment. But when I began to call myself a cad and a scoundrel, and my tears began to flow again (I uttered the whole tirade to the accompaniment of tears), her whole face underwent a kind of convulsion. . . . ‘Why are you here? Why do not you go away?’, but only the fact that it must be very difficult for me to say all this . . . why should she be so resentful or offended? (117)

This is to exemplify how human have transformed and developed their relations with matter rationality. Even the tears have become less significant to the Underground Man who in the introductory parts showed his consciousness. It seems that everything is connected out of material prosperity that has also risked the human values at the end social norms in which they are themselves responsible. Then, questioning the social norms becomes self-mocking and self-reflective what the Underground Man claims in the beginning of the text. The below mentioned lines add:

Even now, after many years, all this comes back to me as very nasty at least I have been felt ashamed all the time I have been writing this *Story of the Falling Sleet*: therefore it is not longer literature, but panel correction. after all, to tell a long story about how I missed life through decaying morally in a corner, not sufficient means, losing the habit of living, and carefully cultivating my anger underground – really is not interesting; a novel needs hero, but here all the features of an anti-hero have purposely been collected, and most of all, the whole thing produces a bad impression, because we have all got out of the habit of living, we are all in a greater or less degree crippled. (122)

Here, the Underground Man decides to end his notes. In a footnote at the end of the novel, Dostoevsky reveals that he fails to make even this simple decision to stop writing, as Dostoevsky says that the manuscript of the notes goes on for many pages beyond the point at which he has chosen to cut it off. It also helps to understand how it blurs the distinctions between hero and anti-hero. The figurative and connotative meaning of the lines highly focus on the understanding of the means of opposites that remain within the underlying facts of socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic agenda of the Russian society are vividly shown through the main character's or the disabled character's interrogative lifestyles, reflects the contractedness of the social norms that possibly blurs the distinction between ability and disability binarism or hero and anti-hero or thesis or anti-thesis binaries in order to overcome with the problems in his society.

IV: Questioning the Social Norms as Challenges

In a greater sense, we developed the concept of new historicisms and its multi facets to measure the text as theoretical modality. As it embodies to the context of viewing the literary text from historical nature of text and textual nature of the history, it covers different dimensions of society and wants to deal with underlying facts in the text. It also consists of some of similarities and differences with the ideas of cultural materialism and cultural criticism that tend to provide the real meaning to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Then, it gives new space to observe much researched thesis that is purposively from socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical aspects. Therefore, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* comes along with the notes in the form of questions on the social norms to reflect the Russian society of his era.

Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* consists of an introduction, three main sections and a conclusion. The short introduction propounds a number of riddles whose meanings are developed and understood from the psychology of characters. Chapters two, three and four deal with suffering and the enjoyment of suffering of characters. Chapters five and six deal with intellectual and moral uncertainty with conscious lethargy or inaction of the main character. Chapters seven onwards except last two are concerned with theories of reason and logic that provides him sufficient proof as the conscious character. The last two chapters are a summary and a transition into second part of intended research that come along its meaning of the phenomenon of his time and space.

The narrator as the Underground Man presents his mystic view of war is described as people's rebellion against the assumption that everything needs to happen for a purpose, because humans do things without purpose and this is what determines human history. The focal problems and issues for the Underground Man is

that he has reached a point of inactivity, isolation and separation that is due to the prevailing social norms of Russian society. Unlike most characters who typically act out of revenge because they believe justice is the end. The Underground Man is conscious of his problems and feels sense of having the desire for revenge. But he does not find it virtuous leads to malice towards the act with its parallel circumstances. Yet he continuously concentrates on his spitefulness instead of his own actions that would avoid the problems about which he is so concerned with. He even admits at one point that he would rather be inactive out of laziness. These things occur due to the social causes, also appear as the norms, become the piles of questions as he faces with great challenge that we can see in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.

The first part of the text also gives a harsh criticism and intellectual attempts at dictating human action and behavior by logic which the Underground Man mentions in terms of a simple math problems two times makes four. He states that despite humanity's attempt to create one cannot avoid the simple fact that anyone at any time can decide to act in a way which might not be considered to be good. Some will do so simply to validate their existence and to protest and confirm their existence as individuals. For good as a simple term is subjective. In the case of the Underground Man, the good here he is ridiculing is just the irony of egoism, selfishness and conceived according to man's wish that they survive in the society and later transforms into norms.

It is the position being depicted as logical and valid through which the protagonist undergoes and challenges to face by questioning the social norms. Since his romantic embracing of this ideal, he seems to blame it for his current basis of unhappiness. This type of rebellion is critical to works of Dostoevsky as it is used by adolescents to validate their own existence, uniqueness, and independence. Rebellion

in the face of the dysfunction is a disorder of adult experience that one inherits within the frame of tradition and society. We could hardly disassociate the socio-cultural, political and historical facts that provide the background to the meaning of the phenomenon of the text through new dimensions of theoretical implication of new historicism and its multi facets.

The second part is the actual story and consists of three main parts that lead to a continuation of the Underground Man's consciousness. The first is his obsession with an officer who physically moves him out of the way without a word or warning. He sees the officer on the street and thinks of ways to take revenge. He eventually decides to bump into him to whom he does on that gives his surprise. The officer does not seem to even notice on the happening.

There is a dinner party with some old school friends to wish Zverkov, one of their numbers to say goodbye as he is being transferred out of the city. The Underground Man hates them when he was younger. But after a random visit to Simonov, he decides to meet them at the appointed location. They fail to tell him that the time has been changed to six instead of five. So he arrives early. He gets into an argument with the four after a short time declaring to all his hatred of society and using them as the symbol of such hatred. At the end, they go off without him to a secret brothel. In his anger, the protagonist follows them there to confront Zverkov once. He arrives to find Zverkov but company has already left. In contrary, he meets Liza a young prostitute at the same venue. It shows the complex dynamic Russian society that undergoes several forms of changes that are due to the unprecedented aftermaths of wars and post-wars and impacts of European philosophy and revolutionary movement. They develop in Russian society as the social norms become the interrogative expression to the Underground Man.

The story further progresses with the silent relation to Liza and the underground man in the dark together. The Underground Man confronts Liza with an image of her future by which she is unmoved but she finally realizes the plight of her position and how she slowly become useless unlike her wants. The thought of dying such a terribly disgraceful death brings her to realize her position that we can see through the relations of the protagonist and Liza at the end of the novel. She then finds herself gripped by the underground man's seemingly poignant grasp of social ills also resembles to the social norms. In this sense, even human emotions have materialized and remains under the control of social norms which could not bring any changes in fact in the lives of the characters even of Liza and the Underground Man undergoes.

So far as we have observed Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, it tries to deal with socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic condition of the Russian society of World Wars and post wars. There occurs other form of changes which cannot do anything to the marginalized people mentioned in the novel as the characters. The way the writer presents his characters to depict his present society really shows the continuation of the norms towards which the writer is very much critical and questions several ways. It surely shares the material relation of the marginalized characters they go reciprocally throughout the civilization of Russian society has been understood from the new perspectives or approaches. The social norms as the Underground Man raises often shows that they cross the distinctions of what we call good and bad, ability and inability, possibility and impossibility and civilized and uncivilized is perceived from new modes of understanding the text as challenges, overcome by the protagonist are the underlying facts are interpreted, analyzed or observed.

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