

**Literary Theory and Literary Criticism**  
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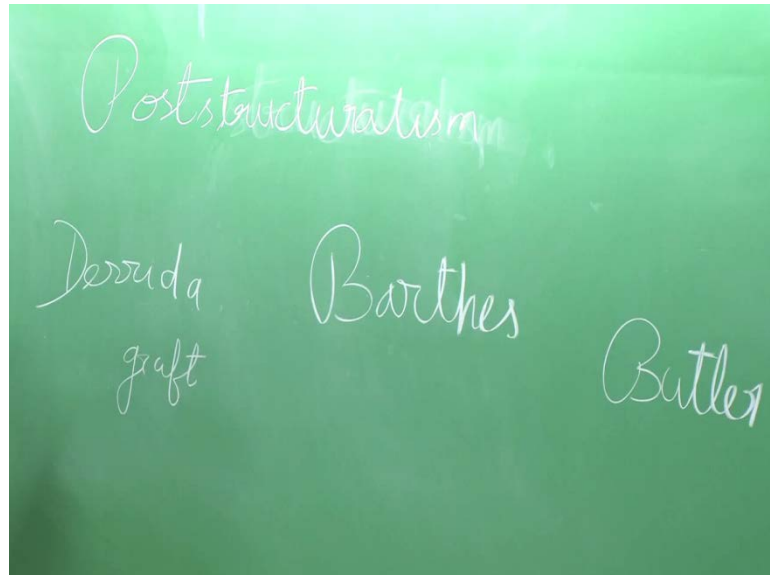
**Lecture - 16**

**Part B**

**Post Structuralism**

Hi friends, so Dr Vimal Mohan John has already introduced you to the key concepts of Post Structuralism and I will continue with that.

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In my attempt to elucidate some of the major concepts and theories related to post structuralism thought, I would be touching upon the writings of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthe, Butler and more. So, post structuralism is an extension and critic of structuralism, especially as used in critical textual analysis which rejects structuralist claims to objectivity and comprehensiveness.

Typically, emphasizing instead the plurality and instability of meaning and frequently using the techniques of deconstruction to reveal unquestioned assumptions and inconsistencies in literal and philosophical discourses. Post structuralism and post

structuralist, specially were concerned with promoting the notion that texts have multiple meanings, interpretation is not fixed and can differ from person to person.

So, structuralism assumes stability, post structuralism looks for change and disturbance. The post structural practice is closely related to postmodernism. Now, I am soon going to draw your attention to a table, extracted from the great theorist, Ihab Hassan from his seminal book the dismemberment of Orpheus, which was published during the 90's. The book and this particular table offer us a way to make sense of some differences between modernism as dominated by enlightenment and we have already seen the characteristics of enlightenment. So, differences between modernism dominated by enlightenment ideas and postmodernism, which is a space of free play and free discourse.

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Modernism	Postmodernism
form	antiform
purpose	play
design	chance
hierarchy	anarchy
centering	absence
narrative/grande histoire	anti-narrative/petite histoire
determinacy	interdeterminacy

This is the table, modernism characterized by form, whereas postmodernism, antiform. There is a purpose in modernism and there is a sense of playfulness in postmodernism. There is a definite design, things happened by design and purpose in modernism, things happened by chance and accident in postmodernism. Modernism thrives on hierarchy and anarchy rules in postmodernism.

Modernism is characterized by centering, postmodernism thrives on the absence of centrality or centering, modernism speaks of grand narratives, grand histoire. On the other hand, postmodernism prides in itself in narrating anti narratives and petite histoire and petite recedes; that is small stories. Modernism features determinacy and this is one

of the key features, key highlights of postmodernism, it takes great pride in its indeterminacy, the indeterminacy of text.

Post structuralism and how the ideas influenced literature. So, if we are questioning or resisting the methods, we use to build knowledge; that is science, religion and language. Then, traditional literary notions are also turn into free play these include the narrative and the author. Now, let us talk about the narrative, the narrative as we know is a fiction that locks readers into interpreting text in a single chronological manner that does not reflect our experiences.

Postmodern text may not adhere to traditional notions of narrative, for example in his book *naked lunch*, William S. Burroughs explodes the traditional narrative structure and critics almost everything. Now, what happens, he critiques everything that is modern and modern government, modern medicine, modern law enforcement and other examples of authors. Playing with narrative includes John Fowles in the final sections of *The French lieutenant's movement*, where Fowles step outside his narrative to speak with the reader directly.

Moreover, grand narratives are resisted in postmodernism and post structuralism thought. For example, the belief that through science, the human race will improve is question. Postmodern knowledge and the building of postmodern knowledge is local situated and locally situated, slippery and self critical; that is it frequently questions itself and it is rules. Because, post structural work is self critical, post structural critics even look for ways in which texts contradict themselves.

So, we have to remember these words contradiction, little stories, petite recedes, interrogation, indeterminacies, anti-play, anti-forms. So, all these include postmodernism and in a way all influenced by the post structuralist thought and philosophy. The author is displaced in postmodernism writings as absolute authority and we already seen this, when we were talking about Roland Barthe.

And the reader plays a role in interpreting the text and developing meaning from the text. Going back again to Roland Barthe, let me refresh your memories; we have already been talking about the death of the author. And Barthe questions and argues that the idea of single authorship is a recent phenomenon. Barthe explains that the death of the author is shatters, modernist notions of authority and knowledge building.

Once, the author is dead and the modern is idea of singular narrative and thus, authority is overturned. Texts become plural and the interpretation of text becomes a collaborative process between author and audience; we have been referring to these ideas again. So, perhaps you may find that some of the ideas are being repeated, but we need to understand that, there is a good amount of overlapping between different kinds of theories.

So, rather than getting bewildered by coming across, so many theories and so many names, we need to understand the common threads that runs across these theories. And one idea is that, the cost question of authorship and readership or spectatorship is continuously foregrounded in all works of art and at different ages in literary criticism. We come across theorists, who give their own interpretation of the, what should be the role of author and the role of readers.

Barthe also tells us that a text is made of multiple writings drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, but there is one place, where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader. So, we also talk about reader response theory and how the centrality of reader is established. So, the death of the author ends by empowering the reader and Barthe's classical criticism has never paid any attention to the reader, it is necessary to overthrow the myth of the writer.

The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author. Another way to think about post structuralist analysis is to focus on the verbal stage, which is a similar to that of more conventional forms of new critical close reading. It involves looking in the text for paradoxes and contradictions at what might be called the purely verbal level and then, we should also look at what is textual stage, so verbal stage, textual stage.

Verbal stage characterized by close reading, textual stages focused on the relationship between common binary oppositions in the work like, male, female, good, bad, high, low, high culture, low culture, light and dark, good, evil, nature, society. So, these binaries are very clearly established in or at the textual stage in which one term seems to be privileged or more highly valued over the other.

So, therefore, you may have often come across this word, this text privileges something. So, privileges is nothing but, regarding one or valuing, one term over and above the other, the binaries. A post structuralist reading might try to look closely at this hierarchy

in order to show, how it is not sustained throughout the work or how the two terms are not oppositional at all, but rather they are interrelated and interdependent.

Now, we also have another stage called the linguistic stage which involves looking for moments, when the adequacy of language itself as a medium of communication is called into question. Such movements occur, when there is an implicit or explicit reference to the unreliability or untrustworthiness of language, juxtaposition of speech and silence or an awareness of the limitation of language.

In other words, movements in the narrative where we are made consciously aware of the problems involving in using language to create meaning. Now, coming from Barthe moving from Barthe to another great thinker, great structuralist, who is also post structuralist, Umberto eco and his concept of the open text. Now, Umberto eco the Italian thinker and his book the open work, it satisfies the criteria of a post structuralist work.

Echoes thesis is that a work of art and especially of contemporary art has an undefined meaning and that the will of the artist was exactly that of producing such indeterminacy or openness. These open works has then to be completed by the interpreter, according to that particular interpreter's knowledge. This idea was considered erotically or heretical at that time and received a very strong opposition notably from Claude Levi Strauss and Eugenio Montale in Italy. These are texts were documented by echo himself in the professors of later editions of this text.

The open work by echo is seen by some to be the very first post structuralist book and consider the classic in semiotics and continental aesthetics. Echo is also credited with the absent structure in 1968, which had a great impact on the transition between structuralism and post structuralism. Here echo suggests that structures are not entities existing ontologically, but further instruments, these are formal instruments and representations by which scholars can understand cultural concepts articulating various systems of differences.

And when structuralism was the main theoretical reference for many this book received massive criticism in France and abroad. Metalanguage and the key theories here is Barthe, who according to Barthe, we may have felt many people feel that, the necessity to move beyond structuralism is there. But, there was clearly no consensus on how this

ought to occur. Much of the study of post structuralism is based on the common critics of structuralism.

Now, Roland Barthe his work on metalanguage is of great significance with respect to post structuralist theory. His work elements of semiology published in 67, he advanced reinforced the concept of metalanguage. As we know metalanguage is a systemized way of talking about concepts like meaning and grammar, beyond the constraints of a traditional. In a metalanguage symbols replace words and phrases and Barthe's other works contributed deconstructive theories about texts.

Dr Vimal John has already explained and great length about the works of Derrida and his concept of deconstruction. So, I will just very quickly go through Derrida's lecture at Johns Hopkins University in 1967 at a particular conference, which also saw people like Derrida Barthe and Lacan invited who were all invited to speak. And his essay or his talk was called structure sign and play in the human sciences; it often appears as in collections of a critical theory as a manifesto against structuralism.

Derrida's essay was one of the earliest to propose some theoretical limitations to structuralism and to attempt to theorize on terms that were clearly no longer structuralist. Further, Derrida also gives us the term graft and this is important, which is his idea of showing how a sign may change, according to the context in which it is worked. So, a signs meaning may change in the context with in which it is place and this is a term called graft given to us be Derrida.

Now, going to Derrida he also says how post structuralism rejects ontotheology. Now, we are not talking about ontology, ontotheology; that is a word where meaning and values are invested in the transcendent essence onto as philosophically means being and theo is God. So, the idea is that values are invested in the transcendent essence of an unchanging principle of divinity. Let us move on to talk about Judith Butler and her seminal text gender trouble.

Butler happens to be a major American thinker and literary critic associated with post structuralist thought. And her seminal book gender trouble, feminism and the subversion of identity, where she explores the persistence of biological sex in feminist theory as the source and cause of the unequal social treatment and status of women. Butler argued the sex was in effect, rather than the cause of social gender difference and that the fiction of

a stable core gender identity was maintained through socially co versed performances of gender.

So, the, we are also getting into the performativity theory and the notion with this the idea of performativity is largely credited to the works of Judith Butler, where she argues that repetitive socially co versed gender performances. Or, therefore you know, these are the things that lead to social inequality and social injustice. These enforced and coerced general gender performances, which aspire to replicate a normative gender ideal, this is a way an ideal male should be here, this is an this is a way in which ideal woman should be here.

So, this by this, this is what we understand by enforcing normative gender ideal and therefore, they influence a production of sex body and gender identity. Now, let us go back to the key ideas of post structuralism thought, what are the questions. So, post structuralist posit is how is language thrown into free play or question in the work, for example, let us see how Anthony Burgess plays with language in a clockwork or you know Russian versus English and all or how Burros plays with names and language in naked lunch.

We post structuralist are also concerned with how does the work undermine or contradict generally accepted truth and how does a work fulfill or move outside the established conventions of it is Jones. So, what do these post structuralist do, they read the text against itself. So, as to expose, what might be thought of as the textual subconscious, where meanings are expressed, which maybe directly contrary to the surface meaning.

They seek to show that the text is characterized by disunity, rather than unity, they concentrate on a single passage and analyze it so intensively; that it becomes impossible to sustain a univocal reading and the language explodes into multiplicities of meaning. Post structuralist look for shifts and brakes of various kinds in the text and see, these as evidence of what is repressed or glossed over or passed over in silence by the text and bring these to the surface analyzing, how their presence affects the overall meaning of the work.

We have already seen the key theorist, Jacque Derrida structural; we have already seen his structure sign and play in the discourse of human sciences. And Dr Vimal Mohan John has also referred to his seminal of grammatology. We also know Roland Barthe and

his death of the author. Deleuze and Guattari and their concepts of rhizome that was published in 1976, so these are other theorists that you should have some familiarity with.

We are also now looking at people like Juanfran's Valiathan and his postmodern condition, Fuco particularly his the Fuco reader published in 1984 and off course Ihab Hassan and his the dismemberment of Orpheus. Some of the seminal works of postmodernist literature, William S. Burroughs naked lunch, Kathy Acker's blood and guts in high school, Pool hosts, city of glass. So, these are the seminal texts that we are considering here.

Let me now take you to the bibliography associated with post structuralist thought. M H Abrams a glossary of literary terms gives you see a very basic idea in an entry point into the post structuralist thought. Arthur Biddle and Toby Fulwiler, reading writing and the study of literature, Steven Lynn's texts and contexts writing about literature with critical theory. Ross Murfin and Supryia's the Bedford glossary of critical and literary terms Terry Eagleton's literary theory an introduction. So, these are the major texts that you should be familiar with.

Thank you very much.