POST-MODERNISM TODAY

TODAY

SIRAJ

Contents

FOREWORD

Post-modernism or post-structuralism, a powerful wave of anti-rational, anti-commonsensical, anti-Renaissance, anti-Marxist thoughts stormed into the academic, intellectual and political circles at the end of the last century. Emanating from Europe, it burgeoned into a devastating trend challenging the concept of truth, any scope of emancipation of mankind from the existing order and also the struggles of the dominated and the exploited towards a new order of things. The birth and growth of such benumbing thoughts worshipping passivity or at best small-scale protests coincided with the decay in the socialist states, frustration of the new generation, the retreat of the radical Left, and the theoretical puzzlement induced by brands of accommodative Marxism. The world capitalist system despite waves of crisis could menacingly appear internationally with the mantra of globalization. This objective situation also helped do the spadework for the rise of the new breed of intellectuals who preferred intellectual exercise in pessimism or exclusively narrow-based thinking like identity, politics, etc. instead of the consideration of a bouncing back with a global perspective for dislodging the international chains of the capitalist system. Such politics of this new trend against radical politics and philosophy obviously provides some soothing balm to the war-weary imperialists. Marxism is resurging on the international arena, protests roaring in the

heart of the imperialist states and the discontent of various sections brewing for an explosion. This small book is an endeavour to critically show the irrational and harmful philosophy and politics of post-modernism/post-structuralism. This critique is also an espousal of the cause of the dominated and the exploited fighting for a new order.

Post-modernism/post-structuralism in its insistence on difference and the fragmented nature of reality and knowledge shows intense insensitivity to history. Structures and causes are dismissed by overstress on fragments and contingencies. Such romantic idealist trend bids adieu to Enlightenment concepts of progress or making history. The bankruptcy of the petty-bourgeois philosophers is eminently evident when they reject any programme to cope with the system of capitalism. In the name of "difference" they concentrate on varied particular identities like race, gender, ethnicity, various particular and separate oppressions but reject the scope and possibility of collective action based on common social identity like class and common interests.

Post-modernism/post-structuralism philosophers and writers are deliberately complicated in their approach, self-consciously difficult in style, and refuse to follow any clarity in presentation of their views. Burdened with numerous jargons, their writings prove to be inaccessible to general readers.

The most influential post-modernist Foucault, an avowed disciple of Nietzsche, was concerned with power and knowledge. He saw knowledge-genera-

tion-power constituting people as subjects and then governing these subjects with knowledge. Power and power in every aspect of life is what he sawn negating its class content; and, in his view, people have no escape route from the multiple sources of power. He also dismisses the view of overhauling the system of domination.

The entire body of post-modernism/post-structuralism literature is anti-rational, openly anti-emancipatory and chooses to raise so many questions without presenting any rational and radical programme. Such trends can at best befog the thinking process by its strange and bizarre logic of confusion. It spreads a linguistic net to destroy the basis of all rational understanding and all experiences attained over centuries by mankind and arrogantly declares that we and our thoughts are the creations of language. This idealism is a dangerous trend requiring critical study and a powerful attack at its roots.

The emergence of the post-modern/post-structural trend is, in one sense, a rebuff against the prevalent western thought of imparting centrality to the subject by the post-Cartesian philosophy culminating in instrumental rationality, systematically reducing the world to the raw material of subjective needs. It was also a critique of Husserlian phenomenology and the Sartrean effort at marrying Marxism and phenomenology. Structuralism, emanating from Saussure's structural linguistics, conceiving language as a structure of differences, accorded at best a secondary position to the subject in the production

of meaning. Derrida drew on Saussure's theory of language, particularly the conceptions of language as a system of differences involving an anti-realist theory of meaning. Saussure emphasized more on the distinction between the signifier (word) and the signified (concept) than on the distinction between the word and the object. This also involved the primacy of signifiers over signifieds so that meaning became a matter of interrelations of words. Derrida and other post-structuralists straightened this theory by denying any systemacity to language. Derrida found the inherent contradictions in the Saussurian language theory, which contains, in his words, "the metaphysics of presence" according direct reality to the subject. Derrida pointed that the endless play of signifiers in Saussure's theory of language must involve postulating a "*transcendental signified*," which is somehow accepted as prevailing in consciousness without any mediation of language. This raises the question about the language itself. Such consciousness, accepted as given, reduces the role of signification to merely a convenient aid to memory or economy of thought. Even Derrida found in this Saussurian view the proposition of impurity in significations as befogging our vision. What is to be noted here is the vulnerable points or weakness in Saussure's concept of the linguistic structure conceding words in relation to other words to give meaning, not by primarily referring to objects. And it was Derrida who, in an atmosphere of dismissal of the notion of Husserl's acting subject, went too far in

quest of a ground of transcendental consciousness. Now the subject is subordinated to an endless play of difference moving beyond history. Derrida starts his journey with the avowed claim to escape from the metaphysics of the presence taking recourse to "*difference."* It is a play of words involving both the disruption of presence as well as substitution of the presence through deferment towards an endless game where one never reaches the unknowable point. The practice of deconstruction, contesting the metaphysics of presence on its own terrain, in reality finds no escape route.

This takes us towards the Kantian unknowable thing-in-itself. It should be stated here that if Derridean textualism does not deny the existence of extra-discursive objects, it does deny our ability to know it. Derrida's endless play of signifiers provides us with the intimation of *difference*, though no more than that, because of the necessarily metaphysical nature of language, writes Alex Callinicos. The Kantian unknowable thing-it-itself comes back to the scene through Derridean "deconstruction." Marxism is a scientific theory that grasps the laws of the development of society and bases itself on practice for making history. **Post-modernist/post-structuralists thoughts stand against this, and any rational thinking. They created fleeting ripples in an atmosphere of temporary retreat of radical Marxism. They got extra fodder due to the setback in communism in Russia and China, resulting in a growth of revisionism. Revisionism, seen (pos-**

ing) as Marxism, is a vulgarisation of the original, depriving it of its scientific essence, and making it, therefore, unattractive to those who desire change. Quite naturally post-modernism appeared relatively more attractive to the intellectual. But, waves of powerful enriched Marxism and revolutionary practice are now coming back like a whirlwind that will provide befitting answers to petty-bourgeois idealist thoughts of the post-modernist/post-structuralist thinkers.

Ours is a preliminary small effort with no claim to successfully grappling with the whole range of post-modernist/post-structuralist thinking. And this note is basically meant for the activist and people aspiring a radical change in the existing order. We promise to make a deeper study of the post-modernist view on literature, physics, etc., and also go into greater depth on its impact on the protest movement in India. We will update this note with such critical studies. We have tried our best to offer a lucid presentation of complex things, yet we admit to our weakness in doing so. Friendly criticism is invited from our readers.

— *Siraj*

Note: The word "Logocentrism" is used by the post-modernist/post-structuralists to denote any universalizing concept like truth, progress, beautiful, etc

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Marxism had to wade through the maze of multifarious socio-political and philosophical obstacles in the last century, particularly after the World War II. Many of such theoretical obfuscation was directly sponsored and nurtured by American multimillionaires. What is ironic is that most of such theories, which raised some short-lived ripples in western universities, soon gathered dust for no takers. The two decades after the World War II were dominated by Talcott Parsons' grand synthesis of Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, Marshall and subsequently Freud. Parson, in collaboration with some other people, developed the theory of structural functionalism to celebrate the virtues of American Society and fight communism. The U.S. Government and academic institutions glorified the anti-Marxist "*Behavioural Approach*" as an enemy of empiricism and a historical approach, preferring to study the "*behavioural world."* This "*Behavioural Approach"* was openly sponsored by various foundations funded by Carnegie, Rockefeller and the Ford foundations. It was followed by "*Post-Behaviouralism."* The *System Theory*, studying the so-called open-and-closed systems, focused on the stability, instability, equilibrium and break-down of a system. This so-called *system theory* led to structural-functional and input-output analyses. All the

efforts were concerned with the individual or with action in small face-to-face groups, less on institutions. Lipset, in 1981, endorsed the development of an apolitical Marxism. Ralf Dahrendorf, basically a follower of Weber, who is projected in the West as a sociologist of the social conflict tradition, declared in 1959:

> The equalization of status resulting from social development of the past century has contributed greatly to changing the issues and diminishing the intensity of class conflict.[1]

But it was only a short-lived phenomenon. The crisis of capitalism, the rising movements of the people and particularly the liberation war in Vietnam in the 1960s and the fast half of 1970s, together with the great Cultural Revolution in China, shattered the foundation of such bourgeois idealist theories. Theories of consensus, equilibrium and celebration of capitalism against Marxism proved to be futile theorisation in cosy academies. Devastating criticism was mounted even in the West, and such theoreticians shrank in the face of never ending struggles and the growing crisis of capitalism.

Following World War II, there arose in the United States a host of crude anti-socialist and anti-democratic theories like the Elite Theory, Group Theory, Power Theory, etc. Without any conceptual basis,

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1. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford University Press, 1959, pp. 22-23.

the Elite Theory preached the idea that in every society a selected few have the right to rule. The Elite Theory reminds us of German Sociologist Pareto's notion of the circulation of the elites. The Elite Theory emerged as a vociferous critique of socialism and democracy. The Group Theory added that the elite need consist of social groups engaged in perpetual struggle for power and domination over each other. This theory ultimately and logically leads to a particular concept of the social system and of political behaviour. It echoes behaviouralism to explain how society maintains equilibrium through a mechanism of "*balance of the group pressures.*" What lies behind those two anti-socialist, anti-democratic theories is the notion of POWER as the primary urge. In a similar fashion the *Power Theory*, having its mooring in the anti-humanist, anti-socialist concept of Nietzsche, Treitschke, etc. advocated that politics is the study of who got what amount of power, when and how. All those theories preached that an urge for power and power relations are fundamentals in the study of politics. As the post-modernist Foucault found power and power everywhere, those above theories also preached crudely a form of power-based determinism.

In sociology, against the grand macro-level tradition there emerged the micro-level interactionist theories. Charles Horton Cooley of the American tradition of social psychology attempted to show in 1902 that social interaction takes place only within each individual's mind as he or she imagines other

people's attitudes and possible responses. To him the fact is that language is always a kind of imaginary conversation. In his words "*The immediate social reality is the personal ideas… society, then, in its immediate aspect, is a relation among personal ideas... Society exists in my mind as the contact and reciprocal influence of certain ideas…*" embodied in language.[2] Thus Cooley concluded in an idealist fashion "*Social person is primarily a fact in the mind.*"[3] This micro-interactionist tradition was taken further by George Herbert Mead and his disciples like Herbert Blumer founding the theory of symbolic interactionism. Mead anticipated the present day vocabulary of post-modernists/post-structuralists when he declared that the self is not one's physical body, but a complicated set of attitudes derived from both inside and outside. So, what Mead presented was a fluid state of self without any consistent and solid foundation:

> We are multiple selves as we have multiple social relationships, and on these we build yet another degree of multiplicity through reflexive relationships among our own selves.[4]

Apparently speaking, this multiplicity of selves is not at variance with reality. But what this view

2. Randall Collins (ed), *Four Sociological Traditions*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1994, pp. 285-286.
3. Ibid, p. 288.
4. Ibid, p. 294.

leads to, is an over-emphatic edge to utter flexibility of the human mind, with no steady cohesive role for any consistent activity as a conscious worker or a revolutionary dedicated to fight to the finish the hurdles in society.

Existentialism emerged as an irrationalistic trend in philosophy particularly in the post-World War II Germany and then in France and other countries. Its origin lies in Husserl's phenomenology and mystico-religious teachings of Kierkegaard. It is an irrational reaction to Enlightenment and German classical philosophy declaring that the essential defect of rational thought lies in that it proceeds from the principle of anti-thesis of the subject and object, i.e. it divided the world into the objective and the subjective. Existentialism preached a sort of irrational reality. For existentialism the true means of knowledge lies in the penetration of the world of "existence" through existential intuition. Freedom lies in the individual's choice among many possibilities, and thus choice is divorced from circumstances and objective necessities; making, thereby, freedom an individual's ethical question, resulting extreme individualism.

The *Frankfurt School*, which emerged in the 1920s in Germany, has its genesis in anti-Bolshevik radicalism and a revised form of Marxism. It shrinks from treating society as an "object" to be examined, an object with its own "laws of motion." Instead the theoreticians of this school generally insist on resorting to "subjectivity" of human endeavours, the

capacity of people to shape their own destiny, and potential for rational and collective regulation of society—although the most pessimistic would argue that capitalism has penetrated the human psyche so deeply as to erode even the potential for an emancipated society.[5] The *Frankfurt School* rejects the role of the proletariat in history and that of progress as shown by Hegel. However, the Frankfurt theoreticians are reluctant to abandon their roots in Enlightenment—the view of history as one all-embracing process in which a historical subject attains its essence. In spite of a general faith in the Dialectics of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno did not want to focus the contradiction between productive forces and production relations nor even the conflict between the proletariat and bourgeois. They rather resorted to some elements of post-modernism by declaring that the Enlightenment had changed into Positivism, to serve capital, to become totalitarianism and to culminate in Fascism.[6]

Now, the attack against Marxism has come in the name of post-modernism. According to Victor E. Taylor post-modernism is a term used to describe a wide spectrum of aesthetic, cultural, historical, literary and philosophical endeavours. In a philosophical context it claims dissociation with logo-centrism

5. Michael Burawoy and Theda Skocpol, *Marxist Inquiries, Studies of Labour, Class and States*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 88, Supplement 1982, p. 56.
6. Paul Connerton (ed.), *Critical Sociology*, Penguin Books, 1976, New York, p. 27.

and dismantling of universal human reason, that is characteristic of modern philosophy.[7]

There are basically two kinds of post-modernism/ post-structuralism. The first, in the words of Richard Rorty is "textualism," which is actually an heir to German classical idealism. Whereas the nineteenth century idealism, Rorty adds, wanted to substitute one sort of science (philosophy) for another (natural science) as the centre for culture, textualism wants to place literature at the centre, and to treat both science and philosophy as, at best, literary genres. The chief proponents of textualism are Jacques Derrida and his North American followers, particularly the late Paul de Man, notorious after the posthumous unearthing of his earlier pro-Nazi writings. The second form of post-modernism/post-structuralism was pioneered by Michel Foucault through his master category of "power-knowledge." While the former type almost exclusively concentrated on language as premise, Foucault, in his theory of power, moved towards the tentacles of power-everywhere and emphasised the power of knowledge. In both kinds of presentation two words denoting concepts come up frequently: Discourse and narrative. In the words of one front-ranking pioneer of this trend, Lyotard, the language for discussion of science or philosophy is "*discourse*," while the language used

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7. Victor E. Taylor, *General Commentary*, in Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist (eds.), Martin Jay, *Post-Modernism...*, Volume I, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp. xii-xiii.

for mythical writings, etc. is "*narrative*." However, he also added that *discourse* too is basically *narrative*; meta-narrative or grand-narrative. In any case, all the variants of post-modernism/post-structuralism owe their fatherhood to Nietzsche. Derrida has acknowledged the influence of Nietzsche in various texts; Foucault even called himself "*simply a Nietzschean*" before his death.

Chapter 2

What Post-Modernists/Post-Structuralists claim

This new fashionable trend challenges the Enlightenment's belief in the existence of underlying essences and unified entities. With this distancing from the Enlightenment it focused on the local and the particular. They argue that there is no such thing as intrinsic nature, an objective reality or an accurate representation of the world as it is in itself. Just as there are no universal laws of history operating independently of particular agents, similarly, there is no truth out there, existing independently of the human mind, waiting to be "discovered."[8] All claims about the nature of the world are embodied in language and mediated through our theoretical paradigm. Hence, we never know the world in itself; what we see and know is the world as it appears to us through the lens of our paradigm. Thus our descriptions of the world are human constructs, devised, used and judged by their capacity to perform certain tasks. This idealist view thus rejects the objective basis of knowledge, the empiricist conception of science and the Enlightenment's quest for philosophic or scientific certitude. The materialist view that some truth can be discovered by scientific observation and philosophic reason is rejected

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8. R. Rorty, *The Contingency of Language*, London Review of Books, April 17, 1986.

by this new petty bourgeois philosophy. The advocates of post-structuralism/post-modernism in their criticism argue that such ideas stemmed from the fundamental belief that there are non-linguistic things called "meanings" and "essence" and the task of language is to express these meanings and represent their essences. Most of all, post-modernists/post-structuralists reject this conception of language itself. What is devastating is their argument that we must drop the idea that language is a system of representation.

Such assertion led the post-structuralists/post-modernists to draw several conclusions like: (1) all languages are human constructs and it is never appropriate to speak of a language as being an adequate or inadequate representation of the world or self. (2) The choice between one language game and another can neither be explained in rational terms nor grounded in "algorithmic certainty."[9] (3) Truth is a property of linguistic entities and it does not refer to an accurate representation or a mirror image of the world (4) There are no absolute referents in the form of "*intrinsic nature*" or "*pure essence*"; meaning is therefore an object of self-creation: it is to be made, not discovered.[10] (5) For Derrida, the signifier is characterized by a "*surplus*," i.e. it supplements the thing itself. Since the sign or signifier does not actually represent the signified, it

9. E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, Verso, London, 1990, pp. 188-90.
10. R. Rorty, *The Contingency of Language*, Ibid.

cannot be reduced to a single identifiable object or meaning. All we can say about the sign, as a text, is that it resonates with several meanings. Its meaning is not exhausted by the author's intentions or the particularity of the historical context.[11] Thus it is said that the reader/analyst has to approach the text with an essential awareness of the "arbitrariness" of the sign and the indeterminacy of meaning. Such a view implies that the search for a unified meaning within a text must be given up. Instead the focus should be on the inconsistencies and the contradictions of meaning within a text. Thus the Derridean *deconstruction* asks the reader not to go in for one meaning but to question, reverse the existing "*oppositions or hierarchies.*" In the words of Derrida, a reading of absences and the insertion of new meanings are the twin strategies and they are employed not for "*tracking down*" or "*discovering*" truth. It is instead the fields of "*free play... a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble.*"[12] Thus it boils down to a field of infinite substitution of words or in other words the acceptance of otherness—a residual content against the supposed conceptual closure "*imposed by the metaphysics of presence.*" (6) The post-modern/post-structural theorists reveal, at the epistemological plane, through their limitless celebration of difference and otherness, the actual impossibility of reading and knowl-

11. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Maryland, Baltimore, 1976, pp. 317-18.
12. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, ibid, p. 51.

edge. They express doubts about the human ability to shape the present and the future, conceding the powerlessness, disintegration and contingency as human predicaments. (7) With the absence of philosophical justifications, solidarity among members cannot be assumed. Since there are bound to be differences among members of a society on any issue, only "*civil association*" allowing for differences, can be imagined.[13] On other occasions they justify the struggles of women, gays, environmentalists, etc. in the context of Euro centric logos of Enlightenment rationality, these theorists celebrate the ethnic and the oriental. For them *Ethnos* becomes an authentic and primary category in social analysis and an expression of their pluralistic stance. Such preference for the ethnic and the cultural is manifested in the writings of this trend.

Post-modernism is the outcome or result of the ideological and objective crises in the period when the prospect of revolution receded to the background and the militant working class movement in Europe was largely assimilated by the states. The Soviet and Chinese degeneration had a great enervating influence on the general mass. At this juncture emerged the discourse of post-modernism, the momentarism of pluralism—at once a radical departure from the past, with concepts, minus a foundation in history, philosophy and all disciplines. It was the robust opposition to the enlightenment ideas,

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13. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p. 318.

reason, cause and effect, and so on.

In the crisis of the western world, post-modernism is not a mere negative response, it is also a sort of distorted protest. It reflects the cynicism and frustration of the 1970s and 1980s and so it is easily accepted in the west. In Derrida's thought, "power" tends to be corrupt. He says that "power" tries to unify everything by force and thus rejects differences. So reject power. The basic fact is, they say, that the tortured remains tortured because the entire system invariably generates the tortured. Whatever political system it may be, the final result is absence of freedom and presence of frustration. Such views gained further credibility due to the rise of bureaucratic revisionist regimes in Russia, East Europe and then China, after capitalist restoration. These views are easily accepted in the western world mired in chronic crisis. For freedom Derrida gave the call for *Deconstruction*.

Secondly, post-modernism raises questions of Reason, which, it thinks, gave birth to the present science, democracy and the notion of progress as well as imperialism and neo-colonialism. Foucault showed that the present form of power and knowledge have created a new form of hegemony.

To summarise the views of post-modernists in the words of a key post-modernist that wants to blend post-modernism with Marxism, Frederic Jameson, we find the following: First, post-modernity is a depthless, superficial world; it is a world of simu-

lation (for example, a jungle cruise at Disneyland rather than the real thing). Second, it is a world that is lacking in affection and emotion. Third, there is a loss of a sense of one's place in history; it is hard to distinguish past, present, and future. Fourth, it is now the world of the explosive, expanding, productive technologies of modernity (as television).[14] In the words of Rosenau, the post-modern mode of thought is largely characteristics of the modern way of thinking, in terms of its method of opposition. Instead of grand narratives, it prefers more limited explanations or no explanations at all. It also rejects the boundaries between various disciplines. Post-modernists are more often startle the readers, than engage in careful, reasoned academic discourse. **And most important is that, instead of looking for the core of society (like rationality, or capitalist exploitation), post-modernism is more inclined to focus on more of the peripheral aspects of society.[15]**

Romanticism in the 19th century also came out against rationalism of the Enlightenment. It saw the motive force of cognition, the experience of the contradiction between the finite and the infinite, the aspiration for the infinite, the frustration born out of the unattained ability of the infinite, an ironical

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14. Fredric Jameson, *Post-modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991.

15. Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*, Princeton University Press, 1992.

attitude towards oneself and one's creation. Romanticists idealised the feudal Catholic past; some of them even turned to Catholicism and became ideologists of the Restoration. Their criticism of capitalism was one-sided, looking at only the dark side of it and preaching for the medieval past. However, a section of them, despite utopian conclusion at the end, made a critique of capitalism and the feudal past in Europe.

Not only romanticism, some other schools of thought like Historicism, Hermeneutics, Critical Theory and post-empiricist theories of science criticised modernism. However, post-modernists/post-structuralists stand on a different plane from them, on some vital questions. Some German Historians and philosophers attributed to the Enlightenment reason for the problems in industrial societies. Herder and some other historians questioned the Enlightenment's reading of history, dismissing all previous ways of life. However, neither historicism nor romanticism questioned the existence of the universal. They did not abandon the search for an objective truth though they questioned the view of a single reality and truth. In certain respects they anticipated the current idealist trend: they considered social reality to be a human construct, its distinctive cultural voice or historical spirit could be recovered. In one sense, the search historical spirit could be recovered. In one sense the search for the objective truth was not totally abandoned. Hermeneutic philosophy gave up the notion of an essential

and universal truth and argued for different types of rationality stressing on history. Empiricist philosophies of science had also some proximity with the current idealist trend like the view that there is no way in which we can know the world in itself. All knowledge, even that of the natural sciences, is mediated through conceptual schemes and subject of interpretation by the members of the scientific community.[16]

The post-modernist/post-structuralists dismiss the hermeneutic faith in the recovery of a single, historically and culturally specific meaning with the twin ideas of indeterminacy of meaning and absence of closure. They also reject the views of those critics of Enlightenment/Reason, by challenging the very quest for foundations and essences, overemphasising the absolute contingency of the self, language and community. Simultaneously, any reading should try to focus on the ambiguity and incoherence present in the text, expecting the reader to loosen the text by allowing other meanings to seep into the text.

Post-modernism derives many of its basic elements from structuralism and post-structuralism, the latter being its main building blocks. Many of the post-modernist thinkers lived in both the trends. For an understanding of this prominent trend this discussion at first touches upon structuralism to move on to post-structuralism with its

16. N. R. Hansen, *Observation as Theory Laden,* in S. Brown, J. Fauvel and G. C. Spivak, The John Hopkins University Press, Macmillan, London, 1981.

additional features exhibited in post-modernism. In many cases post-modernism and post-structuralism appear to be similar in approach. Before going into a critical study of this trend it is made expressly clear that this is neither a comprehensive study by trained philosophers or linguists nor an exercise in futile weaving of arguments detached from the practice of demolishing the bases of capitalism, imperialism as well as feudalism; the former ones breeding distorted reason and perverted man-nature relationship, thelatter tenaciously trying, in countries like India, to move backward to the world of unreason and superstition.

CHAPTER 3

STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism is a method of enquiry, which takes as its object of investigation a *system*, i.e. the reciprocal relation among a set of facts, rather than particular facts considered in isolation. It considers totality, self-regulation and transformation. The structuralists, in general, are concerned to know the human world, to uncover it through detailed observational analysis and to map it out under extended explicatory grids. However, it should be added here that their position is still mainly like that of the traditional position of objectivity and their aim is to explore the traditional scientific goal of seeking truth. To put the concept of structuralism in a lucid way one example may be cited: There are variations in accent and presentation of Hindi, Bengali or such other languages spoken over a vast area. Structuralists will stress to find the elements common in variations of a language forming a general structure of Bengali or Hindi or so on. Going against empiricism and positivism, structuralism wants to hold the focus on relations between the units or elements invisible to human observation. Basically started as structural linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure (and also by Emile Durkheim, in sociological analysis) structuralism has been used by Levi Strauss in anthropology, Roland Barthes in the field of semiotics, some eminent critics in the fields of art and

literature, and even by persons claiming Marxist persuasion like Louis Althusser. When structural analysis is applied to the study of literature, the structure of a poem or a story or a novel, the relations of various elements in the structure become the question of the study. It is not the concern of the structuralist to study the normative or value-based aspect in the structure. The understanding of the deterministic structure-based fixed-meaning is the subject of enquiry. Althusser rejected the humanist and Hegelian themes in Marxism, paying little or no attention to historical changes. Some people claiming themselves Marxists went to an extreme point of structuralism by concluding that "*There is no real objective 'history'; the notion that there is a real history is the product of empiricism.*"[17] Althusser brought in the concept of *theoretical practice* and insisted that reality is irreducibly complex and manifold, subject to multiple causation. He coined the word over-determination for such multiple causative factors. The causality is also structural. The Althusserian system, with all its apparent emphasis on materialist science, downplays the role of human beings as authors of historical development, reducing them to the status of supports or effects of structures and relations of the social formation. It shows its idealism by cloistering knowledge within a wholly circular, self-validating conceptual realism, detached from direct

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17. Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1975, p. 3117.

access to what is given as reality. The web of over-determination ultimately leads to a labyrinthine lane in the realm of praxis.

Structuralism was also a reaction, especially against existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. In his early work Sartre focused on the individual, particularly individual freedom, adhering to the view that what people do is determined by them and not by social laws or larger social structures. However in his later life Sartre came closer to Marxian theory with his stress on "*free individual*" "*situated in a massive and oppressive social structure which limits and alienates his activities*."[18]

Saussure, the father of structural linguistics, (1857-1913) stood against positive physical facts as actual evidence, and argued that physical facts are not sufficient to account for language as *language*, the language of social groups, as signifying and bearing information. Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics and ultimately structuralism in various fields, differentiated between *langue* and *parole*, the former being the formal, grammatical system of language whose relationships of phonic elements are determined, he believed, by determinate laws. Parole is actual speech. Langue can be viewed as a system of signs—a structure—and the meaning of each sign is produced by the relationship among signs within the system. What was important in Saussure's view was a system of signs, a

18. Ian Craib, *Essentialism and Sociology: A Study of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 9.

structure, and the meaning of each sign is produced by the relationship among signs within the system. Here comes the importance of relations of difference, including binary oppositions, as the meaning of the word "dark" comes not from some intrinsic properties of the world, but from the word's binary opposition to the word "light." When this view is applied to the social world, the meanings, the mind, and ultimately the social world itself are shaped by the structure of language. Thus, structural linguistics does not focus on the existential world of people shaping their surroundings; instead all aspects of the social world are shaped by the structure of language. The Saussurean notion of sign systems were further taken to the field of semiotic, encompassing not only language but also other sign and symbol systems like body language, literary texts and all sorts of communication. It is evident that Saussure who became the inspirational source for post-modernism did not reject the societal aspect and stressed that the role of the signifier as word is to impart meaning to the signified, a thing or living being, etc. In the structuralist linguistic system the relation between the signifier and the signified, expressed by language, is not historical but depends on every moment of utterance. Saussure referred to the concept of dichotomy in understanding a single colour. To understand black the contrasting colour of yellow, to understand dog the difference is made with some other animals. Thus the words should be placed considering the differences of the

signifieds maintaining proximity. Similarly, there is the dichotomous inter-relationship between colour and sound, colour and sound with form, and so on. Such a network of relations, Saussure thought, makes a structure. And to comprehend any structure such binarity is considered. He asserted, "*in the linguistic system there are only differences.*" With all this Saussurean concepts of structure, structuralism was born.

In the Durkheimian line, with the advent of Levi Strauss in the 1960s, the analogy between the unity of society and the unity of the thinking of an individual mind is superseded. The members of a tribe are considered to be bonded together by a perpetual weave and shuttle of back-and-forth transactions. In Levi Strauss the unity is no longer linked to centralization. He views kinship exchange as a system of communication and dismisses the biological unit in favour of a larger exchange unit. Thus in the view of Strauss, marriage binds together not just a man and a woman, but a man who *gives* a woman and another man who receives her. Here too culture predominates over nature. The same structuralist view is found in the writings of Louis Dumont who, in his huge work on the Indian caste system, promises to bring forth the ultimate economic basis, but shuns it altogether in favour of the predominating role of Brahminical ideology as a central core of this evil system. This cultural aspect over economics was stretched out further in the post-modernist frame.

Roman Jacobson (born in 1896 and died in

1982), the one-time leader of Russian formalism, made a fusion of formalism and structuralism. Formalism pronounced relative detachment from theory emphasizing "*scientificity of literature*." Formalists stated that "*there is a difference between theory and conviction*" and "*the vitality of science is not measured by its establishing truths but by its overcoming errors*." They also simultaneously stress that new forms build up new contents. So formalism in reality is a form-based scheme. There was criticism that formalists were heading towards fixing various contents in various forms, virtually rejecting the literary content. This form-based literature gave birth to a formalistic, mechanical method. Jan Mukarovsky kept his faith in formalism up to 1930 and then discovered its limitation. He accepted structural analysis without the rejection of history. Mukarovsky distanced himself from other structuralists emphasizing social consciousness. Roman Jakobson who introduced the word structuralism in the field of linguistics way back in 1929 declared, "*I do not believe in things, I believe only in their relationships*." Jacobson, who is often referred to by post-modernists, however, believed that the development of language is teleological because it follows its rules. He, in his later life, criticised Saussurean concepts of langue/parole or synchrony/diachrony and emphasized the semiotic character of language and its relation with various semiotic fields. But he stuck to the ultimate structural relation between the signifier and the signified. But post-structuralists

went beyond all this by simply removing this deterministic relation altogether.

"*The problem of structural linguistics is*," in the words of Richard Harland, "*that, once they have started explaining language hermetically, they find no reason to stop. There is no clearly visible limit where their kind of explanation cuts off. So an original methodological decision to exclude the outside world… gradually turns into a general philosophical principle of unlimited scope*."[19]

The same criticism is also applicable in case of post-structuralism/post-modernism as we progress forward.

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19. Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism*, p. 91.

Chapter 4

Post-Modernism/Post-Structuralism: A Total Rejection of Post-Renaissance Development

Oswald Spengler, in his book written during the World War I, *The Decline of the West* declared the end of western civilization with its dominant values. Four decades later, C. Wright Mills, in his book *The Sociological Imagination*, pronounced the end of the modern age with a virtual collapse of liberalism and socialism. Post-modernists in the current decades do share many of the pessimistic formulations of those writers and others, who, in the world of capitalist onslaughts, imperialist wars and temporary defeats of socialism, present a non-emancipatory dismal picture of the world. Post-structuralists or post-modernists move to the extreme, like the structuralists who believed that the signifier points to one or two signifieds, or in other words, the language of literature proceeds in some deterministic way. There was some scope left for reaching out to truth or fact, i.e. moving towards a centre. Post-structuralists or post-modernists opposed these structuralists' supposed binding the signifier and the signified in a structure. Saussure found the meaning through differences between one signifier from another signifier; as a "cow" is a "cow" because it is not a "horse" or a "dog" or a "tiger," etc. If such differentiation between the signifier and the signified, the

post structuralists argued, is stretched further and further the Saussurean concept of fixed relationship in a structure begins to fall down. Post-structuralists or post-modernists want to unremittingly carry on such negation of the use of certain signifier for some signified in an endless way. Not only that, they think that the moment when a sentence is formed, in a certain unconscious manner, we feel the absence of words which has been abandoned by the used signifier. This way they moved further on to a road absolutely non-deterministic. In this scheme the signifier cannot provide any determinancy to the signified, making the relation between the signifier and the signified extremely uncertain. Thus comes a total rejection of the fact that the signifier truly reflects the signified. This uncertainty of language forecloses, through the view of post-structuralists, the possibility of unfolding oneself to another since "*I am also built by language*." On the basis of this sense of uncertainty between the signifier and the signified Derrida built up his post-modernist theory of deconstruction. It is, however, necessary to keep it in mind that both structuralists and post-structuralists or post-modernists base themselves on a common platform by inverting the general base-superstructure model and reducing base to a secondary or extremely negligible position. Here knowledge is language-based and human beings too are built by language. What post-modernism brings to the fore may be summed up as a focus on language, culture and "discourse" (on the grounds that language

is all we can know about the world and we have no access to any other reality), to the exclusion of: "*economistic*" concerns and supposed pre-occupations with political economy as Marxism preaches; a rejection of "*totalizing*" knowledge and of "*universalistic*" values like western conceptions of "*rationality*"; the general ideal of equality, both liberal and socialist, and the emancipatory theory of Marxism. They emphasize "*difference,*" on varied particular identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, on various particular and separate oppressions and struggles; an insistence on the fluid and fragmented nature of the human self (the "*decentered subject*"), which make our identities so variable, uncertain, and fragile that it is hard to see how we can develop the kind of consciousness that might form basis of solidarity and collective action based on a common social "*identity*" like class, a common experience and common interests. They reject a unilinear development theory, and, in this respect, criticise Marxism. They celebrate the marginal and repudiate grand narratives such as Marxist theory of history, western ideas of progress, etc. They reject the Marxist emphasis on the role of mode of production as a historical determinant, the material or economic determinants. And while rejecting such objective factors, post-modernists announce "*discursive construction*" i.e. language-based construction of reality. Simultaneously post-modernists reject any kind of causal analysis terming it "*essentialism.*"

There are a number of post-modernist views.

Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Lyotard, and such post-structuralists, laid their basis by placing the signifier before the signified. In the words of Derrida "*the meaning of meaning is infinite implication, the indefinite referent of signifier to signified... It always signifies and differs."* This signification resists any implied structural hindrance and opposition. Derrida calls it *dissemination*. Such explanation is evident in Lyotard's theory of *intensities*, in the concept of *power* in Foucault, and Baudrillard's notion of *Synergy*. On this basis attack was launched against the foundations of knowledge in philosophy. Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, et al., are the pioneers of this thought. It was Nietzsche's view that there is nothing like truth, cause and effect, values, etc. Lyotard shows that in the post-modern situation there is nothing like grand narrative and modernism has lost all hope of existence. Foucault declared the death of man. **As a whole, the entire Enlightenment of the Renaissance period came under attack. The very notion of wholesomeness is rejected. Post-modernism is actually an outcome of a crisis situation in the USA and Europe and at the same time a sort of romantic effort at coming out of this situation at the theoretical plane.**

There are many shades of opinion in post-modernism. In the words of Barman Marx was the first modernist. To be modernist in this sense is to create an atmosphere where it provides "*adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world,*

and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are." But when it is stated by Anderson that "*the vocation of the socialist revolution in that sense would be neither to prolong nor to fulfil modernity, but to abolish it*"—we have just the reverse thinking on the role of socialist revolution vis-a-vis modernism. Another writer John Robert in his book post-modernism *and Art* (1990) wrote that "*That is why post-modernism, as a proliferation of a critical legacy of modernism across subject positions, ideological fronts and expressive resources, is an attempt to* keep faiths not only with Marx's materialist view of art, but with his historical method."

Ihab Hassan thinks:

> ...[T]he post-modernist era is marked by a radical decomposition of all the central principles of literature, the falling into deep questionability of critical ideal about authorship, audience, the process of reading and criticism itself.

Philosophically speaking post-modernism raised some critical points, as we shall now recount: Till today, conventional philosophy started from some fundamental concepts or foundational conceptual scheme as constant, true and an inevitable basis. post-modernism states that those fundamental concepts are closed concepts, in ideology or theory. To come out of them needs deconstruction. They think that there is no concept as self-sufficient and

everlasting. Such concepts emerged in some context and so with the contextual changes those ideas also undergo changes. They are not infinite. Post-modernists/post-structuralists think that in universities philosophy should not be taught as a separate discipline; philosophy can at least subsist as a part of other disciplines. It decries the role of philosophy as the highest judgment-making discipline. For this reason philosophical judgment is called a meta-discourse. The main theme of philosophy is epistemology. They think that philosophers base themselves on axiomatic categories. Descartes taught that if we remain alert and follow correct methods then we can acquire correct knowledge without any skepticism. Such knowledge is based on reason so it is incontrovertible. Here the post-modernists take objection. As they rigidly conceive of the relativity of knowledge they don't accept any fundamental knowledge. They are skeptical of all foundational theories and facts and try to deconstruct them. They argue that philosophers have refuted various types of fundamental concepts: Kant attacked Descartes, Bodenstein rejected many concepts of Frege. In the view of the deconstructionists all such arguments are the bickerings, internal to the discipline of the philosophers. Their criticisms were never to come out of the reason-based system. However, the deconstructionists cannot altogether reject philosophy. Descartes in his book *Discourse on Method* changed the pattern of thinking by shifting the primary concern of philosophy, i.e. metaphysics, to reason-based non-skepti-

cal knowledge. What we learn as non-skeptical, is truth. He thought the human mind can be made refined through Reason, to learn the reality. God has made it possible to acquire this knowledge, as He is kind. And as God is not a deceiver, he has created the world knowable, not mysterious with intrinsic vagueness. The point is that we learn through experience, but Descartes opined such knowledge is not reliable. What he stressed is reason-based knowledge to unearth the apparent mystery. Through Descartes epistemology thus took center stage.

After 100 years, while accepting epistemology, Kant brought forth the role of human beings from a relatively secondary to principal role. He thought without the active contribution of man no knowledge is possible. Like Descartes' knowerman he does not merely unfold truth, nor is he the passive receiver, Kant showed that man can make the world acceptable to Reason. Man's Reason-based knowledge may produce a distorted notion, but he is helpless, he explains the world as he can. The real world is never possible to know, and we can never know it. We learn the world basing ourselves on some categories, which are of course not pure imagination. He thought that we learn through the application of some categories and by way of application of sensory organs we explain space and time through the help of intuition. And what we do not learn through experience, they are concepts without experience. As human beings are thinking animals they possess certain ideas akin to Aristotelean logic

which also has two axes; either false or true. Kant said, "*we need categories to make the experience of an object thinkable*." Kant accepted relations between categories to state it in a categorical framework. And those categories, he thought, are found without experience and they are universal and indispensable. Thus categories are true in all respects while experiences may not be.

Post-modernists complain that modern philosophers thought that for everything there must be a cause and effect to get a reason-based conclusion. They critically state that for removing all skepticism, ultimately one goes to mysticism or metaphysics or reason without experience. Post-modernists challenge this ultimate validity of any theory.

Modern capitalism is based on individualistic and egoistic thought. Hobbes (in the 16th-17th centuries), in his social contract theory on the emergence of the state, opined that when man lived in a state of nature it was a state of war of all against all. Thus he justified the emergence of the state, to be free from chaos. This view later became a strong element in modern political theory. Descartes, in the same period, as the father of modern philosophy, was a rationalist and his aim was to base his philosophy on scientifically established truths. His philosophical belief was of organically interconnected branches of one science. In his view there can be only one kind of scientific knowledge and one science. He also had a mechanical view like that animals can be considered machines.

Post-modernism identified modernity in the Enlightenment that opened up a new era in Europe unfolding the process of modernisation. The new thinkers, like Locke, Kant and others started with the basic notion that man is a rational being. The philosophers of the Enlightenment held that any knowledge has to meet the standards of rationality and so rational thinking became the yardstick of measuring truth. Like in philosophy, many thinkers of the Enlightenment believed that politics should also be subjected to rational scrutiny and political institutions are required to follow a rational path. This Enlightenment also drew a dividing line between the sphere of religion and other political and intellectual spheres.

The principal critique of post-modernism is directed against the Enlightenment reason as the core of modernism. Kant and other thinkers stressed that reason must be the guidelines for all action and explanations. Kant thought that theoretical and practical reasons are two sides of the same coin. And that this theoretical reason provides a systematic understanding of our experience and the world. Through practical reason, in the Kantian view, a rational agent moves towards a goal voluntarily adopting means he believes to be right and then follows certain general principles to evaluate the end.

Behind all the above process, post-modernists stress, it is implied that man is a rational animal; free and altruistic and cultivating reason as a regula-

tive principle of all actions. The process is thus characterised by some emphasis on precision, enquiry, critical attitude, empirical data-collection, pursuit of a rigorous methodology, etc., in order to attain some certainty. In an extreme form, this knowledge makes the above agent a self-sufficient individualist who wants to dominate over nature through the attainment of scientific knowledge. Post-modernists make a persistent criticism of the modern ways of life, its reason and epistemology, anthro-pocentrism, historicism, cultural homogenisation, state-centric politics, emphasis on productivity through rampant technological growth and emancipatory notions. Post-modernists claim that the universal or global truth emerging from the Enlightenment reason is false. Their critique is based on the thought that as there are different forms of rationality and heterogenous traditions of reason, there cannot be only one form of rationality; the rationality of the Enlightenment cannot and should not be given any privilege. Foucault, the principal critique of modernism, stated that power and claim to universal truth turned out to be repressive towards all other forms of reason. Such truth, he added, marginalised them as "*unreason*" or "*irrationality.*" Kant was criticised for his theorisation of reason based on Aristotelian logic and his metaphysics.

Discourse, is a term basically associated with Foucault. It is used to designate established ways of thinking together with the power-structure that supports them as the discourse of science, the discourse

of patriarchy etc. The existence of "*discursive practices"* within a society allows for certain subject positions to be taken up, as a person at once belongs to a class, gender, race or such other identities. Modes of discourses are established and modified over time, and ideas of class, gender, race, individuality, etc. are determined by them. In this sense a discourse depends on shared assumptions, so that a culture's ideology is inscribed in its discursive practices. Contrary to the Marxist method of the dialectical way of analysing the mode of production and relation of production as fundamental to study a society, discourses are related to power relations, and the basic consideration is that social meaning often arises at the point of conflict between different discourse. Thus, concepts of gender result from the struggle between the legitimised discourse of patriarchy and the marginalised discourse of feminism. Similarly colonial discourse refers to the group of texts, both literary and non-literary, which were produced by the British writers in the British colonial period.

Epistemologically, post-modernists stress plural, fragmentary and heterogenous realities. They reject the possibility of arriving at any objective account of reality. Lacan wrote about the "*incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier*." They reject the border of knowledge considering it as a human construct. In biology there is living and non-living, plant and animal kingdoms; in science there is the border between physics and chemistry and as they are human constructs they can be challenged.

Derrida believes in a system of floating signifiers, with no determinable relation to any extra-linguistic referents at all. This signifier receives all preponderance over the signified. Post-modernists reject the concept of truth, causality and even questions the status of science itself. For Foucault, knowledge is only fragmentary and there is no continuity in history. So, for him truth is merely a truth within a discourse. Post-modernists think that the human subject is devoid of any unified consciousness but is structured by language. They make a bitter criticism of the modernist view of keeping man at centre-stage. They reject this philosophical concept as "*anthropocentrism*." In Foucault's view human sciences have reduced man to a subject of study and also a subject of the state. The object behind it is to subject human beings to a set of laws to define their entities, e.g. economic, rationality, laws of speech, social behaviour and even biological functioning. Thus the "*real selves*" are which conform to the set of laws of the state. Foucault considered it that such a man as a universal category is the creation of the Enlightenment reason. So he predicted the death of Man. He thought that there cannot be a constant "*condition*" and "*nature*." They are quite strong in their criticism of the modernist view of domination over nature. They think that the anthropometrical view goads man to comprehend the laws of nature with the aim of subjugating her for his desires and aspirations. They stress an organic bond between man and nature.

Kant, Hegel, Marx and others strongly believed in the progressive development of history. Post-modernist/post-structuralist thinkers like Derrida, Foucault and others reject such a view. They do not believe in historical progress. They do not consider that modern society is better than past societies. Foucault strongly criticised Marxism for its faith in historical development. For the post-modernists, history is discontinuous, without any goal, directionless and the narrative of human agency from the past to the present is an illusion.

Post-modernists stoutly oppose cultural homogenisation, which projects a universal culture. This process of homogenisation, when carried on written boundaries of nation-states, marginalises and subjugates culture of various groups and communities. They lay great stress on the question of power. Modern state power suppresses and appropriates the identities, aspirations of various communities and groups. However, post-modernism, unlike Marxism, does not hold the main focus on state power. For Foucault there is no central power; power is everywhere and it is not a thing that can be acquired, and its relations are immanent in all kinds of relations, economic, political, etc.

It is now necessary to refer to some of the salient contentions of Foucault in regard to the concept of power as presented in "*Two Lectures*" in his book *Power/Knowledge* in 1976.

The general Marxist conception of power

is an economic functionality of power. Here "power" is conceived primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of a class domination...

Power is primarily the maintenance and reproduction of economic relations, but it is above all a relation of force... Power is essentially that which represses. Power represses nature, the instincts, a class of individuals... So should not the analysis of power be first and foremost analysis of the mechanism of repression?

...[P]ower must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power...

Foucault starts from some written or artificial or such language-based presentation of some facts to the statement. The statement is about some object that in turn makes one scientific subject and that

also in its turn gets separated to another scientific subject. A number of such presentations make one discourse. For each of the discourses has its centre point based on the ideology current in the market.

In the meaning of words a perceptible difference is obvious between the modern and the post-modern. Every work, in the post-modern/post-structural view, symbolises many different meanings. Such multi-linear meanings were suppressed towards a single meaning during the modern age—through the force of power. With the single meaning man, society and also human life have been given shape. Thus words have assumed the symbol of a power equation. Post-modernism/post-structuralists believe that in traditional society power was decentralised, marginal, dispersed. In the new arrangements power emerged from all sides. No interim or intermediary step remained in existence. For wielding power there emerged a stock of experts, who are to remain in feed-back responsibility at the top, in order to appraise the necessities for making humans in conformity with requirements.

Post-modernism rejects the unilinear approach and strongly prefers pluralism or a many-sided point of view.

Foucault in *Truth and Power* said:

> The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language, relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no mean-

ing, though this is not to say that it is...
incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelli-
gible and should be susceptible to analysis
down to the smallest detail—but this is
in accordance with the intelligibility of
struggles, of strategies and tactics.[20]

Thus the end part of the above furnishes it that
the continuous struggle, tactics and strategies make
us aware of our history. He thought civil society and
political society were tied together through the form
of power. Power cannot be removed from our life,
as if it were passing through our vein. Foucault said,
"*power is everywhere, not because it embraces every-
thing, but because it comes from everywhere.*"[21] So, in
Indian society the marginalised position of the sub-
altern is proof positive. In other words, in civil soci-
ety itself power is dispersed in multifarious forms.

Foucault said:

We should admit rather that power
produces knowledge... That power and
knowledge directly imply one another,
that there is no power relation without
the correlative constitution of a field of
knowledge.[22]

Foucault added:

20. Michel Foucault, *Truth and Power* in *Power/Knowledge*,
p. 114.
21. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, p.
93.
22. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the
Prison*, p. 27

4. A Total Rejection of Post-Renaissance Development

> Truth is not outside power or lacking in power... Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is the types of discourse, which it accepts and makes function as true.[23]

Derrida's version of "*deconstructionism*" argues that all of existence is a text. In "*reading*"(i.e., trying to understand) any text—whether a book, nature or society, or ourselves—we rewrite it. All reading is "*writing,*" a constant, endless process inherent to the living, that cannot be carried out consciously, at least not with the autonomous self-consciousness prior modernity had posited. Hence we can no more determine an author's intent than could the original author. There is no experience per se that is shared by all human beings; everything is a surface that constantly reconstitutes itself. Absence dominates all presence, and we are left to pursue the "*traces*" of an absent itself. What is concealed, for example, on the "*margin*" or in the spaces between the lines becomes as important as what is present in the words of a text. Hence we try to avoid "*logocentrism*." Since all reading is writing, a flux of alternative explanations is inevitable. An urbane openness to diverse interpretations, which actually reduce to a cacophony of voices, is required; whenever anything in reality begins to ossify, the deconstructionist moves in to play the role of solvent.[24]

23. Michel Foucault, *Truth and Power in Power/Knowledge*, p. 131.
24. Gregory Bruce Smith, *Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Tran-*

Such a post-modernist/post-structuralist view focuses on the extent to which reality, including our own being, is constituted by our very acts of trying to use, describe, and understand what it is. Post-structuralism is built on the notion that reality both human and non-human is fundamentally malleable. We cannot, however, do our constituting of reality consciously or rationally. That would require a stable, unchanging actor facing a structurally stable world, and we are not beings with a simple, pre-given structure or nature. Hence the modern desire to consciously or rationally reconstitute the world is seen as a chimera. Any closure is simultaneously rejected.

In post-modernism respect is shown to the tradition, a major part of it being a sort of blind worship of native tradition. This view on tradition considers the concept of time and space is a question of a complex notion. Indian astronomer Aryabhatta predicted that time is measurable. Later we find in Copernicus the concept of zero hour or the point of a beginning. Later it was developed by others. Minkowski's measurable time brought the concept of a four-dimensional world-view. With the notion of length, breadth and width was added the concept of time. As the fourth dimension is measurable, the world no longer remained outside the pale of measurement. Modernism, the post-modernist/post-structuralists' claim, after World War I, found

its reason in the progress of thought in respect of time and space. It wrongly made use of measurable and divisible dimension of time to make the concept of *limited* space. When time and space became "limited," the world was placed in some measurable points. Thus came the notion of Omega point or the point of destruction while the point of beginning was conceived as alfa point. This concept also connected those two points in a straight line. With the concept of those two points came the idea of naming, and thus *time and space* was divided into pre-modern and modern. post-modernism asserts that modernism provided the tag "modern" or pre-modern to certain points in the above straight line. The post-modernist says that the bourgeoisie has taken the notion of "limited" utilising the time-space theory. post-modernism argues that when modernists speak of modernising tradition, it tries to discover good or bad elements in the tradition. While the post-modernist think that they should accept tradition considering the "unlimited," uninterrupted notion of "time and space." It says that reconstruction of tradition or its replication, etc. is not its concern; it is the concern of the modernists. Minkowski himself stated, "*space by itself and time by itself are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality. Only a world in itself will subsist.*"[25]

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25. H. Minkowski, *Space and Time.*

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the intellectual brain behind various trends like Sartrean existentialism, linguistics, the "structuralist" and "hermeneutic" schools of textual interpretation, postulated the primacy of language:

> Language is the house of being. Man dwells in this house. Those who think and those who create poetry are the custodians of the dwelling.[26]

We have seen that Saussure gave the privileged position to "*Langue*" over "*Parole*." The concept of "*Langue*" leads to the concept of "*differentiation.*" When language as signifying, depends on the selection of one linguistic item as against other possible items, language as signifying does not depend upon the particular positive properties of what is uttered and what is not uttered as we generally understand, because in Saussure's way of thinking has nothing to do with images or mirrorings or mental "*things*" of any kind. Such a notion is completely different from the general view of language accepting words as closely related to concrete things. Thus, in the sphere of "*Langue*," the dualism between objective things and subjective ideas fall apart. Such a metaphysical concept is further taken to its extreme point in the theorists of post-structuralism/post-modernism by snapping the link with the societal aspect of language as contained in Saussure.

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26. Quoted in *George Steiner, Heidegger*, Fontana press, London, 1992, p. 127.

Roland Barthes, who had passed through both structuralist and post-structuralist phases, emphasized "*mythologies*" behind the ordinary everyday things of the objective world even when they are simply perceived without concepts or verbalization. Barthes declared that when we eat a piece of steak, what we enjoy is not just that material steak itself, but also the idea of steak. A particular piece of steak carries the interpreted cultural glamour of all steak-hood even before it comes into contact with the taste-buds. Thus a word uttered standing for a general meaning by way of rising to a level-breaking resemblance to the referring or naming or asserting functions.

Post-structuralist/post-modernist current of language theory reaches its height through Jacques Derrida's writings with a priority of the sign over objective things and the subjective mind, by making the sign "*material*" in an unusual way, thereby finally discarded all notions of the objective. Derrida is more concerned with writing. For him writing is language in the most self-sufficient way, it exists not insubstantially in the mind nor briefly and transparently in sound-waves of the air, but solidly and enduringly in marks upon a page. Derrida justifies writing over voice by turning the common-sense way of looking at the world upside down. He stresses that writing is the fundamental condition which language has always aspired. For the post-modernist/post-structuralists constitutes the human world and the human world constitutes

the whole world. Derrida expands Saussurean linguistics by emphasizing writing rather than *Langue*, and by doing this he displaces objective things and subjective ideas with their binary relation. With all this Derrida brings to the centre-stage writing. In effect, he brings a kind of apparent "*thing-ish-ness"* into the inside world. It is the Derridean way of "*materialising"* subjectivity with the help of the Freudian concept of sub-consciousness. Derrida argues that the unconscious mind underlies the conscious mind in the form of writing on the matter of the brain, breeding all speech. The trace in the brain, in the Freudian sense appears as a sign, as writing as a sign. While in Freud there was a relation, however mechanical, between perception and memory in a metaphysical way, in Derrida the trace turns into a sign, of course leaving out all notion of mind or soul. "*Writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself"*[27] Thus Derrida goes to the extreme point of accepting life and consciousness in a dreamy state. He interprets Freud stating that "*speech... figures in dreams much as captions do in comic strips."*[28] Thus the signifier that are fundamental in Derrida's general theory of language, are not to be considered as things which first exist in their own right and then point out to some other things. It is the signifiers signify before they are themselves. We are formed by language and signifier in this Der-

27. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 224.
28. Ibid, p. 218.

ridean model and losing all objectivity assumes all centrality.

The Derridean theory of deconstruction is concerned with what is going on in a text—not by seeking out its meaning, or its component parts, or its systematic implications—but rather by marking off its relations with other texts, its contexts, its subtexts. It means that deconstruction accounts for how a text's explicit formulation undermines its implicit or non-implicit aspects. It claims to bring out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. In the first part of *Dissemination* Derrida offers a deconstructive reading of Plato concentrating on the word *Pharmakon* used by Plato. He shows how the word does service for Plato while it reveals a complex network of signigications associated with Plato's text. The varied significations of the word *Pharmakon* have metaphysical oppositions and hierarchical valuation. The Greek word *Pharmakon* has multiple and contradictory meanings like a drug, a healing remedy or medicine, an enchanted potion or philter, a charm or spell, a poison, a dye or paint. Derrida insists that even when Plato contextualises this word with a certain meaning, the multivalence or the word remaining in effect in the Greek text.

While the western tradition of philosophy points to the binary opposition of the logic for the term like that a remedy being the opposite of a poison, Derridean deconstruction attempts at subverting this dialectical logic. He states that traditional commentator subjects the value of his/her writing to the

authentic meaning of the text that is being commented on. Derridean language works on differentiation but it is a differentiation with a difference or to state precisely with a "*difference,*" a word coined by him. It is in one sense that the differer indicates distinction, inequality, etc. or the other. It expresses "*differing*." The meaning of poison does not exist merely by its *difference* from the meaning of remedy, but also for the *deferring* of the meaning "*remedy*." The meaning that is differed is put off for the present and in time, that differs will have to flow over it. Derrida displaces the assumption of authoral privilege. Dissemination deconstructs the difference between the inside and the outside and seeks to move both interior and exterior. Thus it claims to shake up an endless contradiction. Derrida studies the Platonic text moving at a point where the text is open to a moment of alertly and from which, Derrida claims, divergent paths through the texts can be pursued. In the Derridean deconstructive exercise, this movement is which cannot be experienced if one thinks that the structure of a text is emanating from a fixed centre or origin. Here every origin is always already displaced in the activity of writing, as writing poses signs as substitutes for the intrinsically absent and non-locatable origin—an origin that is always other and different, an origin that is perpetually deferred by writing. Thus we find two fundamental notions of Derrida as well as post-modernism/post-structuralism. The absence of center or origin in a discourse and the concept of Derridean "*deference*" which are

fundamentals to post-modernism were revealed in the Derridean scheme of language. The Derridean approach to reading a text grows out of the thinking that aligns itself in various ways with the work of Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure, Levinas, Heidegger, rejecting the centre in the claimed "*post-metaphysical epoch*."

Jacques Lacan (1901-81), the controversial figure in French psychoanalysis, interpreted Freud in the light of the new structuralist theories of linguistics and focussed on the human subject as defined by linguistic and social pressures. Lacan speaks of the "law of the signifier" in which "*the signifier comes and in its turn exerts upon the desiring subject. Subjects, the theorists and their fellow human beings are quite bound by it.*"[29]

The primacy of language working as a sovereign in the human world is the fundamental pillar of post-modernism/post-structuralism. post-modernism gives priority to culture over nature. Influenced by this trend, a new crop of literature has come up in the name of "cultural studies" obviously distancing itself from earlier studies on culture. Such cultural studies emphasize that differences are always decisive, while similarities are the result only of coincidence. It is the idea, which posits differences, not only as real and important, but fundamental, permanent, and stable, that is to say trans-historical. Like structuralism, post-structuralism or post-mod-

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29. Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, Fontana Modern Masters, Fontana Press, 1991, p. 79.

ernism "*cultural studies*" claimed in the 1980 the position of radical alternative to positivism. Samuel Huntington in his much-hyped book *The Clash Of Civilization and The Remaking Of World Order* in the last decade of the last century elevated the role of culture to an imaginary plane, obviously reductionist in nature. He claimed that with the end of Cold-War, after the exit of the Soviet Union, world politics has now turned into a clash of various cultures leaving aside the role of class conflict and other conflicts emanating from economic causes. The U.S. invasion of Iraq was also now justified as a clash of civilizations.

With the so many "post" theories, post-*Colonial* thought or theory emerged as an offshoot of post-modernism/post-structuralism. Edward Said, the founder of this thought, through his much-publicised book *Orientalism*, published in 1978, appeared as a professedly Foucaultian critique of the West. Said, in the Derridean line, argued that Europe establishes its own Identity by establishing the *Difference* of the Orient. He went to the extreme by bracketing Aeschylus, Victor Hugo, Dante and also Marx in the formation of *Orientalism*.[30] For him *Orientalism* is "*a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient*." Said's *Orientalist Discourse*, stressing the primacy of representation, has given birth to *Colonial Discourse Analysis*. *Orientalism* is also a discourse. In such dis-

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30. Ibid, p. 3.

course-theory also, it is not economic exploitation, but language that is important: language doing the speaking through humans.

CHAPTER 5

CRITIQUE OF POST-MODERNISM/ POST-STRUCTURALISM

What is called a modern society is the new society that emerged from the womb of feudalism. The disintegration of feudalism was made possible by the rise in trade and commerce on a massive scale with the emergence of the merchant bourgeois class. The Italian Renaissance, to be sure, marked the beginning of the modern age. The Renaissance heralded a new age with its emphasis on rationalism, this—worldliness, scientific attitude and secularism. It opened up the new spirit of discovery and scientific and technological inventions. Against feudal tyranny, a sort of humanistic spirit also made its presence felt in that new age. Kepler, Galileo and then Newton laid the basis of modern science. The Renaissance also brought to the fore the concept of sovereign political entity or the nation state. Modern capitalism emerged with the disintegration of the feudal system. The advance in science, technology, communication system, rational thinking, etc. paved the way for the advance of the capitalist system.

Modernisation and its essential features are:

• Industrialisation

• Urbanisation with new mode of production

- Increasing world population

- Growth of working class

- New type of economic relations

- Architecture, engineering

- Modern science with electricity, steam engine, power loom, machine, electronics, international network of communication, massive inventions in the medical field

- Press and possibility of putting into print ideas and opinions.

- A new relation of production

- Modernity assumes that local ties and parochial perspectives should give way to cosmopolitan attitudes and universal commitments; that the truths of utility, calculation, and science take precedence over those of the sacred, emotion, the non-rational; associations in which people live and work should be based on choice not on birth; people should not submit to fatalism; accountability of the rulers and participation of people in the control and removal of tyrannical rule, etc.

- A distinct rise in the attitude towards this-worldliness and a division between this-worldliness and otherworldliness.

Modernism was a cultural outlook, a mood and movement. It held dominance for over a century.

And this modernism also, for a long time, put under pressure bourgeois social organisation. Irving found in modernism a rebellions attitude against traditional forms. Modernism provided meanings:

It tried to remove distance, the distance may be mental, social and aesthetic with its stress on the present and experimentation.

Subjectively it brought humanism and unhindered creativity as found in the 19th century. It attacked religious beliefs in the auspicious, supernaturalism and faith in heaven and hell. It also brought motion and speed through revolutionization of the productive forces.

The middle age was controlled by mystery and death. The rise of Reason opened up the path towards immense possibilities in human beings. Self-consciousness became the matter of intense deliberation. The very important contribution of modernism, coming through Reformation and the Renaissance, was that even knowing the inevitability of death, man disobeyed it by going into conscious creative activities. Thus it overcame the limits or boundaries breaking with tradition.

Heidegger and Nietzsche, the fathers of the post-modernist/post-structuralists believed that the world is full of disorder and that the world has not any aim and objective. The post-modernist/post-structuralists worship the prophets of doom. They reject any discipline in society.

In the whole of the middle ages the debate was between Reason and non-Reason. This Reason

became the enemy of the post-modernist. Modernism stressed on the present, not the past. In fact modernism came as an alternative to religion with a degree of humanism. Modernism wanted to establish life aesthetically what post-modernist/post-structuralists oppose. The latter stress the instinctive elements, what modernism criticised.

The positive and negative aspects of modernization in the post-Enlightenment period are to be judged in respect of fulfilment of the basic needs of the common people—economic, political, cultural, medical, etc. It is necessary to take into account the questions of economic inequality, employment opportunities, colonial or neo-colonial exploitation, maintenance of balance with nature and so on. The massive development in the production of food and tools, the unbelievable development in technology and science, the great break-throughs in the medical field, the extraordinary widening of the horizon of knowledge in innumerable spheres, the changes in the traditional societies marked by the predominance of astricriptive, particularistic and diffused patterns, by limited, special and occupational mobility, and reduced faith in ghosts, spirits and quackery and so on are the fruits of the post-Enlightenment Age. Modernization had been identified by one writer (who, however, now preaches a dangerous view) as a revolutionary process; its technological and cultural consequences are as significant as those of the Neolithic Revolution which turned food gathering and

hunting nomads into settled agriculturists.[31]

When post-modernist/post-structuralists launch crusades against the whole process of post-feudal developments and benefits, it is better to visualise societies sans all those changes beneficial to mankind. No post-modernist/post-structuralists could presumably weave out their theories in the then state of affairs. They want the world to really hark back to the morass of a superstitions backward state without the aforesaid benefits of science and technology.

This, however, does not imply that capitalism and still later the gigantic imperialist power springing from capitalism in the most-modern societies are benedictions for the world people and nature. The large body of Marxist literature is the embodiment of a rational, scientific dissection of the capitalist system as well as a farsighted programme of a socialist society free from the ills of capitalism. Marxism is not merely a theory but also a guide to action. Marxists do admit that the very technology that has produced more and more deadly armaments has also produced a more and more wasteful civilisation in the very centres of the West. The imperialist system's increasing inequality and exploitation and wars are also the results of this capitalist system. There is also a theory in support of modernization which declares the high-sounding lofty view that

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31. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics*, Comparative Politics, Vol. 3, April 1971, pp. 283-322.

when differences between national societies are narrowed off it will lead to "*a point at which the various societies are so homogenized as to be able capable of forming a world state.*"[32] This homogenisation view practically mediated by force to erase pluralities, nationalities, cultures, etc. is befittingly challenged by nationally, cultural and other just movements. Marxists support such just movements and even preach the right to self-determination of nationalities from a state under dominant nationalities. It was Lenin who allowed Finland to get separated after the October Revolution and the Soviet Constitution enshrined a clause for the intending nationalities to secede. Post-modernist/post-structuralists thinkers quite justifiably raised their voice in their writings against the homogenisation process, but no known post-modernist/post-structuralists theoretician are found to pluck enough courage to come to the streets in order to oppose repression on nationalities, ethnic groups, etc. fighting for their rights.

It is true that the roots of opposition between modernity and tradition go back to at least as far back as the period of the Enlightenment. It is also true that some protagonists of modernism posed it as diametrically opposite to tradition in all respects. **A proper dialectical approach rests on rejecting the feudal and even pre-feudal obnoxious elements in order to usher in a society free from all the evils of the past. This does not mean rejecting**

32. Cyril E. Black (ed.), *Comparative Modernization: A Reader*, New York, Free Press, 1976, p. 174.

or brushing aside all the elements of the past. We have to carry forward the precious experiences and contributions of our ancestors embodied in culture, in thoughts, in the vast field of indigenous medicines and so on. In Marx's writings, in Mao's experience in China, etc. references are galore to prove that the best elements of the past, conducive to human progress, were not only appreciated but also were made the best use of in the interest of mankind.

Some American sociologists posit Marx against tradition.[33] In an oft-quoted passage in the *Grundrisse* (Introduction) Marx observed that Greek art, although it is bound up with specific forms of social development, it nevertheless remains for us, in certain respect, "*a norm and an unattainable ideal*" and exercises an "*eternal charm*." Marxists value and project the egalitarian nature of the early societies, which extends to relations between the sexes: both women's productive role and their personal autonomy. There might have been some mistaken understanding even among some Marxists regarding traditional culture and practices but a familiarly with the wealth of Marx's or Mao's writings will dispel such confusion.

The eternal respect for tradition among the post-modernist against science and reason actually leads to a romantic love even for the ossified and

33. Lloyd I. Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition, Political Development in India*, Orient Longman, p. 3.

stagnating social formations and their elements. In the name of tradition then we have to leave untouched the repellent culturo-anthropological factors dividing the exploited people at the bottom of Indian society, we have to abandon our fight against the practice of untouchability, we have to withdraw our concerted battle against primordial loyalties, against sacrifices of human beings and animals to win favours of gods and goddesses, we have to allow the people at a very low technological level to die at the hands of Gunins, Ojhas, sorcerers, exorcists, etc. for even simple diseases without making them conscious to undergo treatments provided by modern medical science, and so on and so forth. The post-modernists will shout out aloud that any intervention to that end by us will amount to imposing "our" power-based science on those people. The question can be shot as to what measures our post-modernist/post-structuralists actually follow in their real-life situation. Do they abhor modern treatments or the affordable technological and scientific facilities while preaching tender love for the tradition? Obviously not.

Marxism is never a closed system. Even Derrida commented:

> ...Marxism presents itself, has presented itself from the beginning with Marx, as an open theory which was continually to transform itself and not become fixed in

dogma, in stereotypes...[34]

Marxism is a historical product. It has its internal strength to cope with the emerging problems and it is also enriched by the developments in science, technology and the experiences of the people's struggle for socialism and its progress in an adverse situation. The debate with post-modernist/post-structuralists thinkers will undoubtedly enrich the cutting edge of Marxism. It is clear that Marxism will enrich itself through a critical study of those trends.

In post-modernism any attempt to know the world as a whole, being open to rational comprehension, let alone the will to change it, has to be dismissed as a contemptible attempt to construct "grand narratives" and "totalizing" knowledge. In the discourse analysis only power is universal and immutable, reducing resistance only to the local level. Actually a typical American kind of pluralism is propagated. In the Foucaultian propositions for whatever claims to facts are nothing but truth-effect produced by a ruse of discourse. Secondly that, whatever attempts are made to resist Power, is already constituted as Power. Then there really is nothing for theory to do except to wander aimlessly through the effects—counting them, consuming them, producing them—and in the process submit-

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34. Quoted from an interview with Derrida in Literary Review, No. 14 (April/May 1980 in Dr. Pradip Basu, *Post-modernism—an Enemy of Marxism?*, In *Cultural Theory and Cinema, An Introductory Reader*, A Journal of Cine Society, Mosabani, Vol. 16, 1999, p. 43.

ting to the continuous whisperings of Discourse, both as Origin and Fate.

The Derridean kind of post-modernism moves to the direction of a "self-reflexive celebration" (one is free to choose any and all subject positions—beyond all structures and all systems), Edward Said's notion of Orientalism with the Foucaultian concept of history, having no subjects or collective projects in any case, and the political implications of Foucault's philosophical position and narrative structure tend not only to reinforce the impossibility of stable belonging and subject position but also to bestow upon the world a never-ending cages for the Discourses of power, and all this leads human beings to nowhere without any scope of emancipation. The Discourses of power present history without systemic, origin, human subjects or collective sites. However, it is a history of all-encompassing Power, which is wielded by none and cannot be resisted because there remains nothing outside the fabrications of Power. History in this sense is not open to change, only to narrativization having occasional micro-level and individual scope of resistance.

Marxism also rejects the notion of "limited" or what the conservative theoretician in the post-modernist/post-structuralists trends declared as "The End of History" with the downfall of the Soviet Union and capitalist restoration in China. But Marxism can never subscribe to such post-modernist notion of blind worship of tradition and the ludicrous rejection of any measurable progress in

social, economic, scientific and other fields in course of a long historical process. There may, however, be some points of agreement with some post-modernist thinkers in respect of marginalisation of some people or arbitrary use of the tag of backwardness on some deprived people by the power controlling the state. Yet Marxism rejects any such view which pretends to be oblivious of or which tries to skip the question of progress or regress in terms of meeting the basic needs of human beings, knowledge and possession of superior or inferior technology, knowledge of the laws of nature, cultural elements, man-nature relationship, human relationship, level of consciousness of the people in regard to nature, socio-economic problems, etc. etc. However, all the variegated aspects might not be focused in all cases or in all contexts. Secondly, certain features like imperialist exploitation or extreme consumerism or the like may crucially overshadow many of the positive elements referred, but this does not require to jettison the whole idea of advancement history has recorded since time immemorial. The concept of time and space as presented by post-modernism contains the unconcealed idea of no progress in historical time in respect of developments in the fields of economy, cultural refinements, medicine, physics, etc.

Marx in his early essay "*On the Jewish Question*" wrote that men have freed themselves from the incubus of religion by relegating it to the personal sphere, cut off from the public hurly burly of com-

petition. In such separation he saw an index of the alienation of man from man, making it impossible for the individual to be a full human being. Still, it was a necessary step forward, and the Reformation which inaugurated it was a revolutionary advance.[35]

The fundamental laws of dialectical materialism are: (1) the law of the transformation of quantity into quality, according to which gradual quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes. (2) the law of the unity of opposites, which holds that the unity of concrete reality is a unity of opposites or contradictions; (3) the law of the negation of the negation, which claims that in the clash of opposites one opposite negates another and is in its turn negated by a higher level of historical development that preserves something of both negated terms (thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis).

It is true that dialectical materialism has been sometimes wrongly placed in terms of historical materialism as something like economism. The economic determinist view asserts that, as the material base of society, only the economy, and even perhaps only its "most material" aspect, productive technology, has real causal efficacy, the political and theoretical superstructure being epiphenomenal., Engels, Lenin and Mao strongly contested such a view.

If dialectical progress is negated, only the prophets of doom or anarchy, with no prospect for progress, would result in an absurd world with nothing

35. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Introduction, 1843.

to measure for studying human history, past or present. The role of common sense, the reasoning power of judgment and any study or praxis should be given a go-by.

Marxists would not generally reject Foucault's thesis that all knowledge is produced within certain structures of power. But they must raise the fundamental question as to whose power and how to change the existing structures of power. Marxists will identify capital, and capitalist relations and their overall structure remaining as the fundamental locus of power in a capitalist state. Secondly, those who are economically and politically dominant will, as a rule, control the structures producing and disseminating knowledge. Against this view Foucault will argue that Power is everywhere, in every social relation, but dispersed, diffused, impersonal, multiple, wielded by no one, with no identifiable origin or defined purpose. **He made it categorical that the history of Power cannot be narrated from the twin sites of political economy and the state. Thus, it is implied that resistance to Power can also not be organised as some project to change the nature of the state or politico-economic system. Foucault also opined that since Power is everywhere there is really no place where resistance can be distinguished from Power itself, what is resistance is in reality another kind of Power**.

Foucault had written his highly thought-provoking books like *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), *The Archaeology of*

Knowledge (1969), *The Birth of Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1975) and the incomplete six-volumes of *History of Sexuality* (1976). His main preoccupation was with epistemology and history of modern sciences concentrating on the central point that all systems of thought stand in relation to Power.

Marxists do admit that modern economic thought arises along with the capitalist production, or modern political thought springs from the time of emergence of the bourgeois state. However, to Foucault there are no particular boundaries between ideology and science, or between true and false knowledge. His main concern is that the relationship between those truth claims of human sciences and the structures of power legitimising them. The question remains whether one can draw a distinction between the claim to truth and the claim to power in every case. Most important is that Foucault denied any objectivity of knowledge that was not an effect of power.

Foucault formulated his arguments along two axes: the epistemological claims and discursive formation of the various sciences, and a historical account of particular discourses as specific Power/knowledge complexes. His main concern was to discover the real properties of what he called the Western episteme, the basic system of all European knowledge as they have been constituted since the Age of Reason from the period of Descartes and

others, and were then stabilized in the Modern Age when various human sciences came into being. This period has been identified between 1790-1950.

Foucault did not find any system in the historical process. There is no meaning, moving stream, no gradual step-by-step or dialectical process of progress. In Foucault's opinion what is found is one type of disjoined, fragmented thoughts emerging at the end of one type of civilization. Such thoughts have been called by Foucault part-knowledge or "episteme." At one stage in the course of time old epistemes yield place to the new epistemes. A Discourse is thus an epistemic construction. And Foucault speaks of full-fledged discourse emerging only after the 16th century because what he called "discourse" presumes, as coextensive corollary, a rationalism of the post-medieval kind, alongside the increasing elaborations of modern state forms, modern institutional grids, objectified economic productions and modern forms of rationalized planning.

In his detailed studies of particular "discourses" like health and medicine, incarceration, punishment, social reforms, etc., Foucault sought to establish a certain binding link between knowledge and Power, humanism and terror, reform and domination, throughout the history of Modernity, Reason playing the role of perfecting all forms of domination. Secondly, Foucault was categorical that there was no one source of power like the state or political economy but discrete practices of power through regulation of sex, imprisonment, sending to luna-

tic asylums, etc., which could only be studied only in their respective autonomous spaces; there was no History as a Pursuit of Liberty, but only histories of Power, productivity and subjugation. So there cannot be any just struggle for freedom since that is also going to help emerge another Power of subjugation. Foucault also sought to establish that the real problem was not the exploitation of labour but what he called technologies of the body: the religion, moral, judicial, medical, sexual, penal and more or less violent means of inculcating in the human body what was supposedly "normal." The very puzzling question that Foucault laid stress on was that power was dispersed in innumerable discourses and practices but there was no person, no institution or network of institutions and interests to whom the exercise of power is traceable; no point of origin where, the wielding of power starts from; no point of pressure at which resistance could be organized; each discourse of power produced its own points of tension and conflict, and resistance could only be multiple, local and transitory. With the omnipresent ghost of power, or in other words, the presentation of an all-pervading power from which man can not wriggle out and perpetually fail to identify the sources or remain blind-folded to the monstrous modern state and main exploiting classes. An oppressed and exploited person, in Foucaultian scheme, is only left with small-scale, local and temporary resistance. This is the dangerous proposition for the exploited and repressed people of the world.

CHAPTER 6

LINGUISTIC IDEALISM OF POST-MODERNISM/ POST-STRUCTURALISM

Post-modernism rejects structures, causes and truth in favour of fragments, contingencies and uncertainty. The all-pervading system i.e. capitalist system is no concern of it, it rejects the study of the systemic unity of capitalism and laws of motion. It is notable that post-modernists attract our attention to consumerism, problems of individual existence, deforestation, the subtle sources of extant power, etc. but one misses the study of the crisis of capitalism and its vulnerable areas to overhaul this system. Its focus on language, culture and discourse blunt the spirit of grappling with the objective world. The basis of post-modernist theories is "discourse" which brings to the fore language which is all we can know about the world and so we have access to no other reality. This idealism has turned language into an all-pervasive force both—sovereign and dominant, virtually diminishing human agency. Everything is discourse you see and discourse is everything. Such linguistic theories, as we have referred to before, unequivocally announce that we are linguistic creatures, the world in which we act is a world we come to know and describe through ready-made language.

Such "discourse" or "text," the jargon may vary, with the basic message remaining the same, defines, limits and conditions what we know, do or imagine

in this world. It should however be admitted that Saussure was the founder of a theoretical, methodological concept which stood against the methodology of linguistics called comparative philology during the heyday of British imperialism and the rise and consolidation of the German nation and German bourgeoisie, who wanted to be a partner or sharer of the spoils of imperialism. He was strongly against racialism. This helped in the fight against racism and fascism. However, the post-modernists/post-structuralists make a cunning use of Saussure to dish out a theory serving the present system of exploitation. Their fatherhood goes actually to the idealist Plato, though they ascribe their real fatherhood to Saussure.

What started out as interpretative methods borrowed from Saussurean linguistics and hermeneutics, in course of time, through a Derridean play of words, post-modernism/post-structuralism reached its height of idealism by making a drastic departure from the objective basis of language. When political struggle is reduced to abstraction by some post-modernists basing themselves on language and language-games, there is no way out to identify the system against which people must have to struggle. Structural linguistics as stated above absolutely concentrated on studying the relations of elements in a given structure, not the content or the normative aspects. Saussure's stress that "*in the linguistic system there are only differences*" provided the theoretical premise of the later-day post-modernists/post-struc-

turalists. In the same way, despite some differences with Saussure, Roman Jakobson's assertion that "*I do not believe in things, I believe only in their relationship*" reminds Saussurean concept. But while they still retained the structural relation between the signifier and the signified, post-modernists/post-structuralists reached the new horizon of idealism by snapping this relation altogether.

One writer, favouring Derridean radicalization of a discourse concluded:

> This radicalization involves the recognition that being post-metaphysical or writing after Platonism is already caught up in relationship between the inside and the outside, the within and the beyond, etc., relationship that, if taken for granted, only affirms the metaphysical bonds that one is attempting to overcome…[36]

One of the chief philosophers of this new idealism, Derrida actually produced so-called radicalism being indifferent to actual social practice against the system of exploitation and oppression. He could easily declare that he "would hesitate to use such terms as 'liberation.'"[37]

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36. Walter Brogan, *Plato's Pharmakon: Between Two Repetitions*, in *Hugh J. Silverman, Derrida And Deconstruction*, Routledge, New York and London, 1989, p. 12.

37. Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction and the Other in Dialogue with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 121, quoted in *David McNally, Language, History, and Class Struggle*, Monthly Review, July-August, 1995, p. 14.

This idealism preaches that with our imprisonment within language, the maximum possibility through the theory of "Deconstruction" is a mere play of words. However, it is hopeless to liberate ourselves from immutable structures of exploitation and oppression, supposed to be fundamentally rooted in language, not in the inequitable social system. What *Deconstruction* can at best do is to mollify our spirit of studying the root cause of exploitation for an overhauling of the system into feeble attempts at a very low-intensity verbal duel with the supposed decentered power at a certain academic level. This so-called radicalism is virtually a call for abdication of political responsibility when capitalism and imperialism threateningly show off their fangs all over the world.

The play of words and also suppression of some words assuming universal forms in Deconstruction, is an open-ended process towards uncertainty with no center or foundation. The idealism is tangibly present in Derrida's play of words, deferring one (of the many) for the other. *Differance* is not God or negative theology, claims Derrida, yet in the first flush of Derrida's more famous account of *differance* in a well-known text he clearly states that *differance* is not an entity and that it makes no appearance and has no truth, observes John D. Caputo. It sounds a lot like the hidden God. Sometimes *differance* is actually that ultimate unknowable, the unknowing of which constitutes the most learned wisdom. Derrida clearly states that when the thought of *dif-*

ferance (Being) "*goes beyond ontic determinations it is not a negative theology, or even a negative ontology.*"[38] Thus difference/differance does not confirm a hidden God (deferring himself behind the chain of signifiers) but neither does it deny God. Derrida himself admitted:

> ...[O]ntological anticipation, transcendence towards Being, permits, then, an understanding is but the ether in which dissonance can resonate. This transcendence inhabits and founds language.[39]

John D. Caputo elucidated the above saying that the role of difference/difference is to establish the conditions within which discourse functions. It founds (and unfounds, undermines) languages, vocabularies, showing how they are both possible and impossible without a closure. So difference/differance establishes the possibility (and impossibility) of a language, which addresses God.[40] This idealist, ultimately God-oriented, boundless, uncertain philosophy of language, which is also supposed to be determining human existence, cannot get us anywhere. The play of words turns out to be a worshipper of God-centered, though the language claims

38. Jacques Derrida*, Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 146 quoted in John D. Caputo, *Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida And Meister Eckhart* in Hugh J. Silverman (ed.), *Derrida And London*, 1989, p. 27.

39. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, ibid, p. 146.

40. John D. Caputo, ibid, p. 28.

to be without any centre of its own. It is obviously an anti-historical, anti-evolutionary, anti-materialist concept of language. Marx conceived of the infinite mind as an illusory projection of finite beings and nature as transcendentally real. Marx replaced the Hegelian immanent spiritual teleology of infinite mind by a methodological commitment to the empirically-controlled investigation of the causal relations within and between historically emerging, developing humanity and irreducibly real, but modified nature. Marxism rejects the logical mysticism born out of conjuring tricks of words as dished out by Derrida.

The "discourse" theory, based on language as the over-arching sovereign, conceding only to discursive knowledge is openly anti-rational and anti-objectivity. Despite variations among the post-structuralist/post-modernist thinkers all have a common foundation: they challenge objectivity and truth. They are quite disastrously anti-scientific. While many structuralists ultimately remained more or less with objective things or subjective ideas, the post-structuralists/post-modernists proceed towards the extreme point considering that we cannot live as human beings below the level of language categories and social meanings because it is language categories and social meanings that make us human in the first place. Thus there remains no deeper subjective reality behind the ordinary socially created intelligibility of our world. This way the objective world is turned upside down conceding the lan-

guage categories and social meanings as ultimate reality. Language in this view, precedes the objective things and subjective ideas. This line of argument gives a privileged position to Culture over Nature, and priority of the Sign over Ideas. This concept of idealism leads to further extremes. Language attains abstract self-sufficient status without the objectivity of things or the subjective mind perennially interacting with the objective world.

Reification (i.e. the act or the result of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent of man and govern his life) transforms human beings into thing-like beings, which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world. Marx discarded such reification in Capital.[41] Marx exposed crude materialism and "*this reification of things and the reification of the relations of production*." With such a so-called post-structuralist/post-modernist view of language we can no longer speak of mere false "reification," instead we see ideas taking on a "thing-ish" objectivity. In reality what suffer from such idealist extreme view are the concept of Truth and Falsity. With the departure of objective things and subjective ideas there cannot be any fundamental role for the truth as a correspondence between the domain of objective things and the subjective idea. In such a foundationless

41. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Ch. 48, 1894.

scheme, when language categories and social meanings are accorded the status of "objective" idea in the post-structuralist/post-modernist way, truth or seeking the truth becomes the inevitable victim.

Such discursive theories turn language not only into an independent domain but also into an all-pervading force, reducing human agency to a non-entity and making human beings merely linguistic creatures. i.e. robots with articulation.

Such theories using various jargons like "*discourse*" or "*text*" are also applied to the political realm as well by some post-structuralists/ post-modernists. And here we face a dangerous pessimism or at best an accommodative feeble resistance at local levels. Oppression or exploitation is supposed to be rooted ultimately in the way in which we are defined linguistically, the way in which we are positioned by words in relation to other words. For this reason, this idealism in the garb of radicalism wants us to live within the prison-world of language. In the face of real-life exploitation and oppression, it offers the rhetorical gestures or the play of words. Derrida hesitates with such terms as "*Liberation*" in the name of "*deconstruction*" and ultimately turns it into an intellectual jugglery of words and a sort of self-satisfying narcissistic exercise. Foucault is deliberately silent on imperialism and can only think of low-level, local resistance. Sloterdijk provided the quintessential post-modernist view of resistance for our times. Borrowing from

Nietzsche's *Diogenes* Sloterdijk highlights the "sensual embodiment" of protest flouting standards of citizenship, urinating and masturbating in the marketplace as paradigmatic acts.[42]

Thus such new idealism in the present age of globalisation and threateningly increasing power of imperialism and states represent an obstacle to revolutionary struggles on all fronts as: it negates a scientific understanding towards the development of the social system (with it's a historical approach); diffuses focus on the chief perpetrators of exploitation and oppression (by seeing domination everywhere, delinked from the system); and by spreading pessimism in any alternative system, with the understanding that all power corrupts. Instead of plugging the loopholes in the theoretical domain and practice, such linguistic idealism leads us to torpidity and pessimism.

Spinoza (1632-77), the Dutch materialist philosopher rejected dualism of Descartes preaching that only nature existed, being the cause of itself and needing nothing else for its being. For Spinoza, man is a creature in whom the mode of extension, the body, is coupled with the mode of thought, the soul. Engels appreciated his materialism which freed material consciousness, thought and language from idealism. He did not accept Cartesian division of

42. It should be remembered that Sloterdijk is a prominent devotee of Rajneesh who founded the Rajneesh Ashram. Sloterdijk's view presented in Manas Roy, *Marxism: The Dilemma of Critique*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 12, 1993, p. 1253.

bodiless consciousness and thoughtless body connected by God in the pineal gland.[43]

Idealists broadly preached that abstract thought was already in existence which later entered human brains, thus emerged language. Spinoza rejected such a view like "*I think, i.e. my body thinks*." This materialist view was a rebuttal of idealist concept. In the Indian philosophy, the Yoga system of Patanjali, *pratibha* is synonymous with *Prajna,* the supreme faculty of omniscience. According to the philosophy of grammar built upon the basis of *Patanjali Mahabhasya* by Bhartihari, *Pratibha* is intimately bound up with the origin of knowledge and of the objective world. It is the foundational thesis of the *Sabdika* that the source of all phenomena is Eternal Verbum, called *Sabda Brahma* or *Para Vak.* We may assume that the *Sabdika* Godhead in this idealist view has two-fold aspects as *Transcendent beyond Time* (in which it is above all predictions in thought and language and as *Immanent in Time*—in which it is the subject, as well as predicate, of all judgements). Now it is assumed that knowledge as a mode[44], which is no other word than from verbal associations, evidently for the reason that it originates from *Sabda*. Hence an object (*arth*) which is

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43. Cartesianism (the Latin transcription of Descartes' name) identified matter with extension or space. He contended that a soulless and lifeless bodily mechanism combined in man with a volitional and rational soul. Thus he believed in the existence of both consciousness and reality as mutually exclusive with reality reflected in consciousness.

44. A mode which excludes Eternal *Jnana* or *Brahman.*

knowable (*Jneya*) is also nameable and cognisable and the relation between the name and the nameable, as between knowledge and knowable, is an eternal relation, which the Supreme Being simply manifests in the beginning of each aeon. The manifestation of this relation is co-eval with the origin of the objective world. Naming and thinking being are virtually identical process. This manifestation of the Universal is the same as the revelation of the *Veda*, which is nothing but the body of eternal names and thought in eternal relation to the Universals. The *Veda* is thus synonymous with *Pratibha*, the self-revelation of the Supreme Thought.[45] The supreme transcendent *Sabda* is as it were the dark background of all manifestations and forms, the Absolute of the Indian grammarians. Thought is same as the object, while the former is an internal and the latter is only an external aspect of one and the same Reality. This way we find that for idealist Bhartihari this original consciousness remains in the form of words, ie. the world of consciousness = language = God = *Brahma*. With such views it is no wonder that post-modernists flock to Hindu mythology, as insects to a light.

The Bible states: "*In the beginning was the Word*"[46]. So also was announced in the Vedic scriptures "*God is word.*" This idealist view propagated that logic or any thought is nothing but the thought in language. Plato, Descartes, et al. also considered that the

45. Gopinath Kaviraj, *Aspects of Indian Thought*, the University of Burdwan, 1984, p. 12-15.
46. John 1:1, KJV.

reflection of thought is language. Hegel went back to Spinoza and found it that human thought cannot be solely expressed as perceptible form through language. Working man works as a conscious man. Language is only a part of his whole consciousness, Hegel added. However, for Hegel, thought is produced independent of human beings, thought is a sort of subjective mental activity.

In the words of Lenin:

> Essentially, Hegel is completely right as opposed to Kant. Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract—provided it is Correct (and Kant, like all philosophers, speaks of correct thought)—does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. The abstraction of matter, of a value, etc., in short all scientific (correct, serious, not absurd) abstractions reflect nature more deeply, truly and completely. From living perception to abstract thought, and from this to practice—such is the dialectical path of objective reality. Kant disparages knowledge in order to make way for faith: Hegel exalts knowledge, asserting that knowledge is knowledge of God. The materialist exalts the knowledge of matter, of nature, consigning God, and the philosophical rabble that defends God, to the rubbish heap.[47]

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47. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebook*, Vol. 38, p. 171 in *Lenin*

Marx and Engels were not so much concerned with developing a theory of language. Yet their occasional dealing with the question of language leaves for us a materialist conception of language. Marx's observations relevant to linguistics and linguistic philosophy concern the problem of the essence or nature of language. In *German ideology* we find the thesis of the unity of material-social activity and language. For him communication is not just one of the functions of language. On the contrary, language presupposes, both logically and factually, the continuous interaction among the people. Criticising the idealist view of language Marx and Engels clearly observed:

> Language is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they were bound to make language into an independent realm.[48]

What the post-structuralists/post-modernists have unequivocally accepted is the independent existence of language turning human beings into its creatures. What comes out as the centrality of the Marxian view on language is its essentially social aspect, not just contingent or secondary. As consciousness is a social product, so also language is

on Language, Raduga Publication, Moscow, 1983, p. 35-36.

48. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, quoted in David McNally, *Language, History and Class Struggle*, Monthly Review, July-August, 1995, p. 13.

also a social product. Materialism rejects the view of idealists who detach consciousness, thought, ideas, etc. from labour, social production, in other words, practical human activities. Language is thus the form of specifically human consciousness and the consciousness of social beings. Marx wrote in *Feuerbach, Opposition of Materialistic and Idealistic Outlook:*

> ...[L]anguage is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men.[49]

This is what Marx, the materialist, understood as language. The overall explanatory logic of Marxism revolved around the basic question of positing theories and concepts within practice in order to advance it. Thus it considers the interconnectedness within wholes and differs from those views, which emphasize the relativity of reference to language. The idealist view which moves the other way with language is inevitably trapped within language. It is where the post-structuralists/post-modernists want us to lead, rejecting the rational object-subject relationship ultimately to become worshippers of signs-words, and symbols.

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49. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 32.

Marxists consider the sign-system of any physical nature serving the communicative functions in the process of human activity. Obviously it plays an important role in the formation of human consciousness. Human consciousness cannot exist outside of language which is socially conditioned. It is a means of accumulating knowledge and passing it down from generation to generation. Knowledge, both perceptual and conceptual, or in other words for the abstract thought language is essential. Language is essential for concretising. Yet it will be wrong to consider language and thought identical. Once a language arises in a society, it develops its own laws, which are different from thought. It is true that the words can, dog, leaf, etc. possess no qualities as such of the animals or things in them but they are socially accepted words and human beings can easily differentiate the words meant for specific living or non-living things. The language signs maintain some inner "structure" or structures but not detached from the objective world. What post-structuralists/post-modernists are engaged in is the abandonment of a subject, be it philosophy or society or the other as a discipline by giving precedence to language structure over it. Thus signified is reduced to an insignificant existence with the dominant and sovereign role of the signifiers, Derridean deconstruction theory in some cases invites curiosity and even unearths the deferred meanings of some words but it cannot get us further to deconstruct the oppressive social system. Actually

he wants to say that the language of the ruling class is undecipherable by the common masses and it has to be deconstructed by a small-range deconstruction process abstracted from the real political and other straggles. When Marx asserted that "*Ideas do not exist separately from language*"[50] it must not be deemed that they are identical and that linguistic structure determines the thought process. It is stated that the ideas of the ruling class in every epoch become the ruling ideas. From this Bakhtin under the pseudonym Voloshinov found it that "*the sign becomes an arena of the class struggle.*"[51]

Roland Barthes declares that when we eat a piece of steak, we also eat the ideas of the steak. Such view can be stretched to an absurd level. To elucidate this absurdity an instance may be cited. In 1999 the daily *Asian Age* published a photo of a Hong-Kong hotel with four persons sitting around a dining table on which plates were properly placed before each "eater." There was a menu but no actual food as such. The waitress only served them "food" for mental eating as per order. This may be said a post-structuralist/post-modernists eating. This language-based absurd thought is far removed from what Marx considered language as the immediate actuality of thought. The mental eating or the Barthes' eating of an idea of a steak can be explained

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50. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1939, p. 163.
51. V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973, p. 23.

through the Soviet natural scientist Pavlov's reflex theory. Pavlov said that man is not only capable of forming temporary connections on the basis of sense stimulation but also can react on speech, which had become a sign automatically standing for sense stimulations and sense objects. Pavlov called this system of conditional reflex to language as "*second signal system*."[52] Despite elements of emphatic naturalism and weakness of early scientific investigation, in Pavlov's view there also remains some link with the social aspect in forming the meaningful sign system. However, an over-structuring of this reflex signal in all thought process will only lead to the absurd concept of Barthes or of mental eating, privileging the signifier over the signified for all occasions.

The post-structuralists/post-modernists, semioticians in particular, refer to the all-pervading sign-field in the capitalist world. But their apparent condemnation becomes groundless, the more power they attribute to signs and words, the more they lose power to position themselves against the capitalist, consumerist society. They do not have any programme to invoke the struggling spirit from within the society. They go beyond the logic of the structuralists and make post-structuralist/post-modernist positions increasingly more absurd post-structuralist/post-modernist than ever, to a height far

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52. I. P. Pavlov, *Conditional Reflex and Psychiatry*, International Publishers, New York, 1941, p. 93, cited in Amal Dutta, *Social Psychology and Revolutionary Practice*, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1985, pp. 6-7.

removed from the objective reality. A make-believe world crashes in the course of time and no amount of lying can suppress the true conditions of the world and the universe. It is to befog reality and confuse the intellectuals and large number of people to remain passive against oppression. It becomes more sign-ish that the sign itself, allowing sign to work cutting off the link between the signifier and the signified in a sort of reckless fashion towards a sort of idealism radical in word, conservative in reality. It becomes an anarchic play of words or signs subverting socially controlled meaning. Sign is posed as if something material, the only reality and thus they discard all notion of social reality. The wretched of the earth are invoked by post-structuralists/post-modernists to rest satisfied with mentally consuming words for food, not the actual food. And the oppressed and the exploited have to deconstruct the world of signs, the system breeding inequality, oppression and exploitation. The deceptive notion can best be summed up in the words of Lacan: *"It is the world of words that create the world of things..."*[53]

It must be remembered, as Bakhtin finds that all signs—from word to traffic signals are related to the material world and they are social in nature and for this social aspect, speech is the lifeblood of a language functioning through communication. This social interaction cannot be simply discursive or emotive. Speech is not a realm with an indepen-

53. Quoted in Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, Fontana Modern Masters, Fontana Press, 1991, p. 95.

dent existence. It is only one aspect of a multifaceted network of social relations. In a class society signs are also involved in the prevalent relations and for this relations of hierarchy exert in a considerable way on the language and speech as a consequence the realm of speech with the existence of hierarchy and domination there also remains a steady stream of resistance. The accent of words by hierarchically placed people naturally reflect the class aspects. Thus sign becomes an arena of class struggle and an arena of violent reactions as well. Andre Beteille in his study of a Tanjore Village[54] found it that in the Tanjore district Sanskrit has been a major influence on the bramhins. Here bramhins and non-bramhins represent two different cultures, reflecting the class divisions between them. As the study shows this is reflected in both their speech and language.

In a study of dalit dialect of the Tamils the remarkable differences were like the following:

> Caste status appears to be the dominant social variable correlated with linguistic variation... The dialect differences appear to be used as expressions of social identity. That is why we find in Tamilnadu, Bramhin dialect which is distinguished from Harjan Dialect.[55]

54. Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power, Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1971, p. 53.

55. G. Srinivasa Varma and N. Ramaswamy, *Harijan dialect of Tamil*, Annamalai University, 1976, Introduction, p.

Similarly Jhon Gumperz found in his study of village Khalalpur in Saharanpur in UP the distinct speech pattern of the Chamars from that of the upper caste.[56] So a Rajput with high socio-economic status warns a caste brother that he is speaking like a *Chamar*;[57] Some writers have also found supposedly mystic powers in a language like Sanskrit which actually helps in Brahminisation. Surnames were used as status symbol in the middle ages by the aristocracy.[58] In Italy restrictions were imposed under Fascist rule on Christian names for Germans and Italians considering that those were against national sentiments.[59] Judico Greek-names were also banished under Fascism. Social stratification pervades in a language, particularly in greeting, apology, expression of wishes, etc.[60] The above makes it abundantly clear how sign becomes the arena of struggle against domination and exploitation.

If there is domination there is also resistance. Post-modernists like Foucault also noted that language is a terrain of power. But the emptiness of his view is revealed when relations of power are reduced to discursive or linguistic relations. This power has no identifiable source in society and as

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56. Jhon J. Gumperz…, p. 32.

57. Ibid, p. 37.

58. Max K. Adler, *Naming and Addressing…*, pp. 107-108.

59. Ibid, p. 122.

60. Ibid, p. 173.

power is constituted by language and we are supposed to be in the prison-house of language, then there is ultimately no actual possibility of resisting that all-encompassing power. The Foucault scheme also dismisses the basis of real resistance. Making a distinction between words and speech, Bakhtin asserted that speech does contain both meanings and themes. The latter involves accents and emphasis that the speakers of various social groups try to give to words for the necessary transmission of experiences and expressions in different contexts. The way of speech varies from one context to the other. And here remains both the possibilities of domination and resistance in a relatively unequal speech pattern with distinct genres spoken by the dominant and the dominated classes. The dominated use their own accents, norms, etc. while resisting the oppressors. There is no master discourse which permeates all contexts although those who exercise power may try to impose a single discourse upon their subordinates. For Bakhtin (Voloshinov) signs are multi-accentual, and the ruling classes also continuously try to reject this multi-accentuality of signs imposing a single world view through discourse. They make it appear like a supraclass, attribute an eternal character to the ideological sign. Counter discourses of the exploited arise as a form of resistance and they emanate from their experiences in the productive activities, relations of productions and inter-actions among themselves.

The Italian Marxist, Gramsci, found that the

supremacy of a social group or class manifests itself in two different ways: domination or coercion, and intellectual and moral leadership. This latter type constitutes hegemony. Social control takes two basic forms: besides influencing behaviour and choice externally through rewards and punishment, control is made internally "*by moulding convictions into a replica of prevailing norms. Such internal control is based on hegemony*," which refers to an order in which a common social moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, in forming with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour. Gramsci opined that this hegemony is also obtained by eliciting "*consent*"[61] Gramsci, however, never accepted such hegemony as total as there always exist ideas and attitudes that are "*counter-hegemonic*" against dominant values and ideas. For him a member of the producing class:

> ...has two theoretical consciousness (or one contradictory consciousness): one that is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbs.[62]

This enables us to grasp the revolutionary pol-

61. Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 24.
62. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 333.

itics in terms of the contradictions pervading the experience, activity, and language of the oppressed. Gramsci's view simply helps us understand Voloshinov's (Bakhtin's) conception of speech genres in the domain of practical politics of resistance: The exploited using the dominant speech genres and more egalitarian genres in a different relationship to their equals as using a counter-discourse against the dominant discourse. However, Bakhtin's (Voloshinov) multi-accentual sign does not connote infinitely multipliable meanings as some writers try to indicate. Bakhtin (Voloshinov) did not go to the abstract post-structuralist/post-modernist way of detaching language and speech from the complex relations men enter into for the production and reproduction of the conditions of life. As language is social and related to the objective world, productive activity in particular, the counter-discourses cannot transcend the reality. And here lies the difference between post-structuralist/post-modernist uncertain, infinitely open-ended idealist views with the objective Marxian concept of multiple discourses as oppositional to the discourse of the ruling class. Similarly when a Dalit in India reacts to the upper caste oppressors' domination in his/her dialect, hated by the oppressors, this opens an arena of struggle. The struggle for the right to speak one's own language against a dominant language of a dominating group also is a front of just struggle. These are the real-life questions and we Marxists treat the question of language facing them, materialistically.

Chapter 7

Critique of the Dangerous Ideas of "Death of History and Ideology"

In Marx's words: "*Ideas, when they take possession of the masses become a material force.*"

The Italian Marxist thinker Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* contributed to Marxist theory by avoiding the orthodox Marxism reducing social consciousness for the most part to a mere reflex of economic condition. Gramsci brought in the concept of hegemony, a system of alliances, which the working class must create to overthrow the bourgeois state and to serve as the social basis of the workers' state. Gramsci argued that in the modern condition a class maintains its dominance not simply through a special organisation of force but because it is able to exert a moral and intellectual leadership and make compromises (within certain limits) with a variety of allies who are unified in a social block of forces which Gramsci calls the historical bloc. This bloc represents a basis of consent for a certain social order, in which the hegemony of a dominant class is created and recreated in a web of institutions, social relations, and ideas. This fabric of hegemony is woven by the intellectuals of society, thus for the revolutionary party with the task of achieving a socialist state the counter working class hegemony must be developed.[63] This is from a great

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63. Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*,

Marxist thinker and a very useful idea to compre-
hend the mechanism of a modern state and the role
of ideology. Lenin emphasized the coercive and the
real nature of a modern state behind the screen of
bourgeois democracy while rebuffing the revision-
ists, worshippers of the bourgeois state. Mao fur-
ther enriched the reservoir of Marxism by profusely
shedding light on the role of ideology, particularly
with his gigantic experiment in the Cultural Revo-
lution of China.

It is true Marx and Engels at one time over-
stressed the economic side and Engels even self-crit-
ically stated:

> We had to emphasise the main principle
> vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it
> and we had not always the time, the place
> or the opportunity to give their due to
> the other factors involved in the interac-
> tion...[64]

In the same letter Engels conceded: "*T]he ulti-
mately determining factor in history is the production
and reproduction of real life.*"

However, the force of Marxism lies in the fact
that there are numerous passages in the writings of
Marx against economic reductionism. It is the com-
plexity of the relationship between the conditions of
social production and the world of ideas and culture,

Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International
Publishers, New York, 1971.

64. F. Engels, *Letter to Joseph Bloch*, September 21-22,
1890.

which remains the domain opened up for investigation by historical materialism, cannot be studied by the simplistic formula of economic reductionism. When Maurice Dobb, the writer in his studies in the development of capitalism shows that the English Industrial Revolution was possible for the inventions and favourable economic circumstances, he shows the immense power of science, skill and revolutionary spirit in the emerging circumstances. Marx, Engels, Mao and other great Marxists laid so much stress on the role of class struggle. Marxism contains in it the twin-role of voluntary efforts of the masses and their advanced detachment along with the objective socio-economic condition. The stress on class consciousness and class struggle as an ideological weapon emanates from the Marxist concept of the role of working class ideology. It is to be emphasized that Marx himself had rejected "contemplative materialism," a materialism which neglected the central importance of human subjectivity. Marx asserted the multiplicity of causes in capital:

> An economic base which in its principal characteristics is the same [may manifest] infinite variations and gradations, owing to the effect of innumerable external circumstances, climatic and geographical influences, historical influences from the outside, etc.[65]

65. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III., Ch. 47, sec. 2, quoted

Some people and CPI(M)-like parties naively propagating the inevitability of socialism without plunging into the sea of class struggle for the destruction of the existing order are actually the worshippers of fatalism. Historical materialism also rejects "*the general path of development prescribed by fate to all nations*."[66] And here comes the role of a Communist Party armed with the revolutionary ideology guiding the masses through the proper path predicated upon the specificities of the country and also the international context.

When the neo-liberal bourgeois theorists declare war on ideology. The target is basically Marxism. Daniel Bell in 1970 in a paper entitled *Post Industrial Society: Technocracy and Politics* stated that de-ideologisation is the essential condition of "post-industrial society." The American economist, J. K. Galbraith considered the dominant role of the state in the post-industrial society both internally and externally by capturing overseas market as "*a new era of capitalism in the post-industrial society*" was accepted in uncanny readiness by the protagonists rejecting the differences between a capitalist and a socialist state. They claimed the irrelevance of Marxism-Leninism in the "*post-industrial age*." There is a strange similarity between the theorists of

in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Blackwell Reference, Oxford, 1983, under "Determinism."

66. Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence,* Moscow, 1975, p. 293.

"*post-industrial society*" and the "*post-modernist age*." While theorists of "*end of ideology*" in the "*post-industrial*" society downplayed the capitalist system as such along with the role of ideology, the post-modernists do not consider totality of the material world with no reality of truth. Truth is always discursive or present in the realm of logic. Hence it is extremely relative. As in this view everything is relative and split, there cannot be the consideration of a social system. There is no capitalist or its substitute socialist system. In the post-modern view there is no class or class interest but only different identities. post-modernism rejects revolutionary ideology and its basis like the theorists of "End-of-ideology." Fredric Jameson declared in his book post-modernism *and the Cultural Logic, of Late Capital* clearly in 1991, that post-modernism has turned out to be a "*continuation and fulfilment of the old fifties' 'end of ideology' episode*." In the same line the reactionary Rightists' ambition to fashion a new grand narrative is Fukuyama's book *The End of History and The Last Man* (paid for by the Olin Foundation). Fukuyama, the former State Department official under US president Bush, and a Rand Corporation functionary, preached that the victory of western liberation with the downfall of the Soviet Union registered the final stage of history. Huntington, the head of national security under the US president Jimmy Carter, in his notoriously anti-left book in 1996, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order* echoed Fukuyama commenting that with the

absence of the Soviet Union there is no "*threat to the Free-World*" (p. 34-35). The de-ideologisation concept of those Rightists with the projection of an anti-Marxist world order coincides with the pessimistic, anti-Marxist furore of the post-modernist rejecting the possibility of any grand battle to topple the existing order.

CHAPTER 8

CULTURAL STUDIES THE TUNNEL VIEW

Like the post-colonial theories, cultural studies emphasizing culture or cultural differences as fundamental, permanent and stable emerged in the end of the last century. The earlier British New Left in the 1950s and 1960s led by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams contributed to the field of culture linking working class culture to domination and liberation rejecting the dogmatic reductionist view prevalent among some Marxists. Diametrically opposite to the optimistic, basically pro-poor orientation of the above, the recent Cultural Studies having genetic links with post-modernism that cropped up expressing itself as radical, but in reality when it toed post-modernism/post-structuralism, the result was depoliticisation. In the words of Robert W. McChesney:

> The professionalization of Cultural Studies implicitly encourages depoliticization, which makes it far easier to get funding. For those who abhor radical politics or believe that radical politics must be secondary to institutional success, this depoliticization is a welcome turn of events, a sign of the field's maturity...[67]

The very foundation that culture or difference

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67. Robert W. McChesney, *Is there Any Hope for Cultural Studies*, Monthly Review, March 1996.

among people based on culture as something permanent has its root in the orthodox religious and community ideologies of the past. post-modernism identified the enemy in the Enlightenment reasons crudely regarding the threatened Enlightenment values themselves as the problem, the fountainhead of all oppression. What the Enlightenment consciousness did positively do to a great extent was separating the domain of politics from the domain of religion. The rich contributions in various fields of knowledge in the recent centuries had to stridently battle with the prejudiced and dogmatic view of cultural immutability. Like everything cultures are also changing but the recent theories of cultural specificity consider that differences between cultures are always decisive while similarities are only coincidence.

Edward Said's, *Orientalism* is located in the cultural studies emphasizing European humanism's complicity in the history of European colonialism. Such Foucaultian notions can be faulted on the basic question: this narrative of convergence between colonial knowledge and colonial Powers simply can not be assembled within Cultural Studies itself, because histories of economic exploitation, political repression, military conquest, and ruthless colonial policies can not be simply assembled within such limited studies. It is true that colonial, European humanism, had a capitalist rationality and colonial culture had a role in the colonisation of the East. Yet it is sweeping and one-sided to lump

them in the Cultural Studies itself as fundamentals of colonialism. The theoreticians of Cultural Studies virtually relegated to the back burner the role of political oppression, economic exploitation, military conquest, etc. With this almost exclusive target at the western "Metropolitan Culture" Edward Said reached such a dangerous position.

> Resistance to imperialism does not, of course, only involve armed force or band of guerrillas. It is mainly with nationalism and with an aroused sense of aggrieved religious, cultural, or existential identity.[68]

Thus resistance is not mainly the armed struggle along with such various levels of movements of the masses, of course inclusive of the struggles against colonial, feudal or reactionary bourgeois culture, but mainly the struggle against the alien culture. Such a view in practice begets a crop of arm-chair critics who can never dare to cut off the foundations of the colonial or the capitalist system. Of course, in spite of his ideological problems, unlike many of the others, Said was a staunch protagonist of the Arab/Palestine cause against Israeli Zionism.

Samuel Huntington, the head of national security under the U.S. president Jimmy Carter declared in *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of The World Order,* that cultural differences are fundamental because they involve domains defining

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68. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, ibid, p. 27-28 (emphasis ours).

"*relations between human beings and God, Nature, Power,*" is at one and the same time to reduce cultures to religions, and to regard that each and every culture emanates fixed specific concepts. Samir Amin has raised a very relevant question. To quote Amin:

> ...[W]hich "cultures" are we talking about? Those defined by religious space, by language, by "nations," by homogeneous economic region, or by political system? Huntington has apparently chosen "religion" as the basis for his "seven groups," which he defines as Occidental (Catholic and Protestant), Muslim, Confucian (although Confucianism is not a religion!), Japanese (Shintoist or Confucian?), Hindu, Buddhist, and Orthodox Christian...[69]

Such a view must be pleasing the religious fanatics who preach Hindutva or Islamic or Christian orthodoxy. This is also a very important question of methodology and orientation of a social scientist revolutionary. Huntington imaginatively and with definite purpose predicted that after the fall of the Soviet Union:

> ...[T]he most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political or economic. In the new world the

69. Samir Amin, *Imperialism and Culturalism Complement Each Other*, Monthly Review, June 1996, p. 5.

most pervasive, important and danger-
ous conflicts will not be between social
classes, rich and poor or other economi-
cally defined group.[70]

Such mapping of history or painting the course
of unfolding history informed by a purposely "grand
narrative," is an incitation to religious clashes. This
does not mean we do not support struggle of reli-
gious minorities against discrimination or such
struggles against religious domination. Such a
USA-endorsed view rejects or banishes the eman-
cipatory politics against the capitalist system and
considers capitalism as universal and permanent.
The BJP, the main Fascist political force in India
must draw inspiration from Edward Said's formu-
lation on mainly national or cultural resistance or
Huntington's prediction on basically the rise of reli-
gion-based civilization. Hitler denounced the class
politics of the Communists in Germany and instead
raised successfully the ghastly anti-human battle-cry
of German nationalism based on anti-Jew, anti-class
so-called Aryan culture of the past.

The communal Hindutva ideologues in India
carry on an insidious propaganda that the Hindus
are turning into minorities in their own land of
so-called Hindu cultural heritage. The RSS supremo
M. S. Golwalkar publicly acknowledged his debt to
Savarkar. He adopted Savarkar's theory of "*cultural*

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70. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the
Remaking of the World Order*, ibid, p. 28.

nationalism." And what is this? It is embodied in the BJP's manifestos of 1996 and 1998 and expectedly fits perfectly with the orientation of post-modernist Cultural Studies. It reads:

> Our nationalist vision is not merely bound up by the geographical or political identity of media, but defined by an ancient cultural heritage. From this belief flows our faith in cultural nationalism, which is the core of Hindutva.[71]

It should not, however, be misconstrued that Marxists altogether junk nationalism and the role of cultural identity. In various struggles cultures of the people have played an important role in rousing a spirit of oneness and a sense of identity against colonialism or the oppressive order. In various local level peasant resistances like the Wahabi movement, Moplah revolts, etc. religion of the oppressed peasants helped in the solidarity of the oppressed peasants. However, this appeal of a particular religion, as Islam in case of the Moplahs, had a limiting role in spreading the flame of revolt among the Hindu oppressed peasants living in the adjoining areas. The nationalist revolutionaries taking an oath in the name of Hindu god or goddess during the armed struggle against the British alienated the Muslims. Instances abound. Marxists judge or support a movement in consideration of genuine anti-imperi-

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71. Quoted by A. G. Noorani, *Anti consensus, Pro-hate*, Hindustan Times, 21 January 2003.

alist, anti-exploitative nature but may not subscribe to all the elements associated with the politics of such a movement. What post-modernists provoke, preach, concentrate on and support is the view that religion or community-based identities are stable and a substitute for class identity and solidarity of the masses. Caste, community, religious and such bonds are inherently too narrow, weak-visioned and one-sided to ultimately face the global attack of imperialism and reactionary classes at home.

Chapter 9

On Power

Discourse theorists, basing themselves on the approach of Michel Foucault, discover power as universal and immutable, reducing resistance only to the local level. They consider knowledge, even of Power, is always partial. Affiliations can only be shifting and multiple, to speak of a stable subject positions is to chase the chimera of the "myth of origins." Thus history without systemic origins, human subjects or collective sites is nothing but a history of all-encompassing power. And this power is wielded by none and so cannot be resisted because there is nothing outside the fabrication of power. Therefore resistance can only be provisional, personal, local, micro-level. Foucault and his followers have put forward explanations of the workings of power almost totally within the domain of the subjective. Such theorists see power as negotiated between individuals and leave them at the mercy of "power" and in this way, our attention is taken away from any possibility of collective political resistance. Those theorists brush aside the question of class and refuse to give weight to or evaluate different elements of Power. For the discourse theorists Power is diffuse and is nowhere, rejecting any formulation of specific strategies and tactics for change. Marxism discards such subjective theory and considers that power is centred in the external material world, rather than

simply in people's head. So, the complete elimination of its internalized form will be impossible until power inequalities within society are first removed.

Foucault began his theoretical journey foregrounding the infinitude of micro-powers and how they are "*invested, re-aligned and integrated*" into a globalizing strategy of the state. He then shifted after some years to the privileged role of the state as the point of strategic codification of the multitude of power relations and the apparatus in which "social hegemony" is formulated. Regarding their respective dilemmas, Foucault by his emphasis on "social surplus" and dispersion of micro-powers remaining intact virtually fails to produce any consistent interpretation of structural domination. Some critics find that such dilemmas ultimately led Foucault to sharply turn to personal ethics at the end of his life. Then emancipation is presented as a process of self-formation of the subject.[72] This shift in attention to the self-formation is dismissed by Marxists as pure and simple idealism. Marxism also teaches us about the ideological power and the way of overcoming the oppressive ideological power in the process of social transformation. Marxism does not deny multiple elements of powers but holds the central focus on the ownership of means of production as the main source of power. Simultaneously it considers that the power of ownership goes far

72. Michel Foucault, *The Final Foucault*, James Bernauer and D. Rasmussen (eds.), Cambridge, the MIT Press, 1988

beyond mere economic control. The discourse theory not only befogs the questions of state and the ownership of means of production, it casts a black pall of power scenario making any real resistance impossible.

Chapter 10

Totality

Post-structuralists/post-modernists think that grand theories, by virtue of the consideration of totality as a unified, transparent entity, ignore a basic problem: totality represents no more or less than a slippery zone that constantly undermines itself by sheer surplus of meaning, surplus of elements, relations and practices. Against the notion of totality Foucault attempts at highlighting the "*contingencies that make us what we are"* or attempts at investigating the continuous, diffuse, local "capillary character of disciplinary technologies." Derrida rejects totality because in the discourse or language there is no center and it is the field of infinite substitutions exhausting totalization. With this rejection of totality post-structuralists/post-modernists insist on *"difference"* and the fragmented nature of reality and human knowledge. Thus there is no structured process, not even in the capitalist system with its systematic unity and laws of motion. There is no truth, any notion of "*making history"* but only anarchic, disconnected and inexplicable differences. The post-structuralist/post-modernist view on totality basically stands on two notions: (i) fragments and impossibility of reaching at truth (ii) discourse. And those two are intricately related to each other. It is the world of words that create the world of things, said Lacan. And from this comes the idealist con-

cept that language is doing the speaking through human beings. As language is supposed to be without any center with infinite substitutions, contingencies rejecting the concept of the whole become the destructive course of this new brand of idealism. Foucault charged that Marx played the very negative role against the efforts at decenterings:

> ...[B]y the historical analysis of the relations of production, economic determinations, and the class struggle—it gave place, towards the end of the nineteenth century, to the search for a total history, in which all the differences of a society might be reduced to a single form, to the organisation of a world-view, to the establishment of a system of values, to a coherent type of civilization...[73]

It is half-truth and anti-history. Marx was not a crude idealist to conceive of erasing all conceivable differences in any future classless society, not did he make any search for a "*total history*." Dialectics teaches us about multiplicity of contradictions as well as the principal and main contradictions. Marx avidly studied the historical process and discovered those contradictions, the resolutions of which through the intervention of subjective forces would wheel history forward to a social system. But Marxian dialectics never says the end of history in such

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73. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, New York, 1972, p. 11-12.

a new society, nor does it deny the non-existence of all the earlier contradictions or emergence of newer ones. Secondly, Marx never claimed to embark on a project of total history of capitalism. For the theorists of fragments against totality without any concern for social progress through revolutionary struggle, there is no need for a comprehensive view with definite focus on the important contradictions and classes in the capitalist system. None can deny the importance of many different types of histories, local histories, histories of religions, medicines, art, literature and so on and so forth. Among so many histories Marxism is basically concerned with the socio-economic dynamics of a society and its movement at a certain stage towards the dissolution of the old order for a new socialist and then communist society. Therefore historical materialism basically studies the main centers to be dislodged or replaced, the main contradictions of a country in a given stage and the classes in the society.

As for people like Foucault, Derrida and the band of post-structuralists/post-modernists there is no such project of changing the system of capitalism itself, there is no need for developing a total view of the state of things. Those idealist theoreticians are however, consistent in such rejection of totality with the associative notion of casting aside the very prospect of reaching the truth. As truth is a taboo and it eludes them how can they accept total-

ity?[74] However, it is absolutely wrong that Marxism rejects or discourages other histories of various fields of knowledge or histories of localities, regions, etc.

It is necessary to make a little elaboration of the Marxian concept of totality. For a Marxist methodologist what the investigator knows is founded upon his contact with the external world through his senses, the material basis. Hegelian dialectic enables the study of the "organic wholes" and of the inter-structural relations that those wholes involve. Some people mistakenly construe a single whole. The dialectic makes it possible to study society—such as capitalist one—as a differentiated whole or totality of each structure (i.e. inclusive of component parts). Marx had taken Hegelian dialectics as a tool of analysis in the study of the whole and the inter-structural relations that this whole involves in a historical process. Marx found that the relations are internal to some whole or totality of which they consist in reciprocal interdependence. Thus facts are logically interdependent. In this way Marx concluded that each of them is only a one-sided view of the totality or whole. It is to be kept in mind that Marx's notion of totality is different from Husserlian phenomenology using the notion of "*totality.*" Marx's dialectical method demystified such phenomenology by concentrating on the living historical relation linked with the real and by giving the notion of whole or totality, meaning in the concrete reality of an honest

74. Elsewhere this question of reaching the truth has been discussed.

investigation. But the real moment, detached from the whole, with Husserl and particularly with his followers, becomes idealism and speculation. And here comes the question of practice. "Totality" is not an abstract category. It is moving with life throughout and with the life of what thought perceives—but it is not thought. Beyond the phenomenology which, above all, conceives of totality as a structure, Marx conceives totality as a source. In Capital, Marx begins with an analysis of the commodity, both because it is the basic expression of the relations between men in the capitalist socio-economic formation, and because, historically, the commodity mode of production preceded the capitalist economy itself and constituted the point of departure. In short, the characteristic of the dialectical method of Marx is to refrain from separating the study of structures from the study of the internal dynamics of these structures, of these organic totalities, and the contradictions, which act as their motive force.

It is not new to reject totality or taking into consideration fragments, even during the age of the rise of empiricism through John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume. Treating facts in isolation was common and the search for intervening links, i.e. the necessary links that connect facts to their essence (i.e. the totality or whole) was abandoned. In this way individual aspects held sway over the methodology of totality: the parts were prevented from finding their definition within the whole, and instead the whole was discarded as unscientific or

else it degenerated into the mere "idea" or "sum" of the parts. Marx's concept of society is a complex whole or totality encompassing both structure and super-structure. His methodology involves two movements; the first consists of a movement from the empirical to the abstraction involving isolation of the components of the facts under study. It is not that components shall not come under focus but they have to be studied not as mere fragments but as components of the whole, in certain relationship in a process. The second movement is the transition from this first phase of abstraction to the concentration of many determinants, hence unity of the diverse.[75]

The obstinate dismissal of the question of whole in favour of fragments and contingencies and the entire concept standing on the discourse theory cannot explain social reality, nor can it think about revolutionary change in a society. As a natural corollary of such petty bourgeois views we are invoked to deny history for the supposed absence of any systems, no scope of general opposition to the existing order, no scope of getting at the roots of the many powers oppressing us and that there is no possibility of emancipation.

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75. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Vintage Books, New York, 1973, p. 101.

CHAPTER 11

DIFFERENCE

Post-modernists/post-structuralists insist on *"difference"* and the fragmented nature of reality and human knowledge. Instead of accepting the structural process accessible to human knowledge, they hold the focus on differences. They emphasize "*difference,*" on varied particular identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, on various particular and separate oppressions and struggles, on the fluid, fragmented human self (the "decentered subject"), making our identities extremely variable, uncertain and fragile.

The guru of post-modernists/post-structuralists, Nietzsche said that man becomes human by being the other of the non-human, he being the other of slave, etc. He argued and what his disciples echo that future humanity would have to be determined by accepting a variety of differentiated roles.[76] He further said that man would have to act "as if" he were determined by instinct, without delving into the self in search of rules for action.[77] To him difference had to appear natural or all action would be ironic, detached and uncommitted. He went to the extreme by declaring that out of homogeneity, difference would be re-created, first through the difference of state and the resultant differentiation of

76. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Vintage Books, 1966, p. 38.
77. Ibid, pp. 279-300, 302-303.

consciousness. From this flowed his strong repugnance to socialist equality or even any sort of distribution of good for the greatest number in the bourgeois Benthamian sense. He preached that the root cause of decay "was brought to a peak by Jesus: with him every man was of equal worth and had equal rights; out of his doctrine came democracy, utilitarianism, socialism, progress now defined in terms of these plebeian philosophies, in terms of decadence and descending life."[78] post-modernist/post-structuralists worship Nietzsche who preached eugenic breading, birth of the superman, eulogised the well-bred splendid stock of the ruling class in Germany, France, England, Italy, Russia, etc. He detested feminism, democracy, equality between man and woman. He thought that splendid stock of ruling class was corrupted, first by Catholic praise for feminist virtues secondly by the puritan and plebeian ideals or Reformation and thirdly by insufficient emphasis on "*difference.*"[79] **Nietzsche's over-emphasis on "difference" naturally led him to such a reactionary height. He became the father figure in Nazi Germany, which drew inspiration from his racialism and the notion of predatory modern hegemony of Will. Heidegger joined Nietzsche in founding the philosophy of "difference" that has gained so much currency among the post-modernists. But for Heidegger, "difference" is never**

78. Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy,* 1933, p. 420.
79. Ibid, p. 429.

primarily a human contrivance, even though it changes. It must be, however, recalled that his own thought was the carrying forward of Nietzsche's view. And he became directly associated with German Fascism.

One of the central issues of post-modernism is related to the problem of Nature overlapping with the question of "*difference*." Some post-modernists/post-structuralists think that they should transcend the anti-nature animus of modernity—not by *Willing* the natural as a myth, as with Nietzsche, any more, than by affirming that *no* part of difference is a social construct—but by legitimising self-presenting difference, respecting it and the interactions that flow from it. Post-modernists/post-structuralists in their bid to follow the Nietzschean tradition prescribe that difference is preferable to identity, otherness to sameness and thus dismiss inadvertently that all universalism is oppressive. As a corollary of this extreme view they dream of a human world free from all law and constraints, floating ambiguously from one "*subject's position*" to another. Thus they posit human subjects as merely the effect of cultural forces, privileging culture over nature. They reject the notion of whole and without any programme to tackle the system of exploitation and oppression they describe the relations of production—if they are compelled to call them as such—as mere fragmented, diffused or disorganised ones. And along with the strong view on language, or discourse constructing "the real," the notion of "difference"

is given all importance. Post-modernists/post-structuralists state that all difference is relational, based on the play of unstable surfaces, where, with Derrida for example, the surfaces are seen as signs that point to no ultimate signified or source. It is a thoroughly theoretical imposition upon the phenomena. These post-modernists/post-structuralists have written "natural" difference out of existence "*only to extol difference as a free-floating, ever-changing, contingent surface*." This deification of surface is perfectly Nietzscheanism. It refuses to accept *physis* as self-presenting and not based on our projections. It must be admitted that *physis* presents itself in a variety of ways and there is very little primary Nature left to us to which we can return. In the common-sense terms, Nature and habit always melt away making attempts to completely differentiate the parts of the whole difficult and so focussing the two separately opens a path to absurdity. Both unity and diversity should be counted in a dialectical way against such Nietzschean tradition.

It is true modernism of the West preached history as only universally valid and universal. Such unilinear notion rejected localised and other histories outside the universal as outmoded. It is an element of exclusivism of modernity which can be justly criticised. Marxism admits difference obviously not in the post-modernist way which abandons the concept of whole, truth, emancipation and so on. Marx's understanding of the movement of history was not based on a simple belief in progress. Much

of Marx's intellectual energy was devoted to a monumental critique of Enlightenment thought related to capitalism's exploitative nature and its inherent contradictions. At the same time he projected the alternative to the path of capitalism.

In the name of "difference," Foucault's view on cultures and traditions remaining outside the universalist norms of concrete programme of action quite naturally leads to worshipping pre-modern elements and depoliticised passivity. And this settles for a different mode of domination, locally different understandings steeped in cultural practices in the societies: what is ironic that the violence in those societies, each being different from the other, however, does not get minimised by their multiplicity. But to worship the "difference" as being intrinsic to societies is to legitimise and provide feudal moral licence accepting all the horror-inspiring practices in such colonial or semi-feudal societies of the East. This is the danger of irrationally worshipping orthodox practices in the name of legitimising "difference." Lyotard is in agreement with Foucault in rejecting Marxism and Reason as meta-narratives in support of "little narratives" of ethnic minorities, local communities and traditional beliefs. He posits "culture" and "customary knowledge" against the rational and the scientific. Culture of a people is supposed to be "constituted" as a "difference." The "difference" is clearly a primordial difference. In addition, such culture is knowable to the insiders, not to the outsiders, the "foreigners." Such extreme rightist

views on the "difference" between insiders and out-siders is an extremely welcome concept to the BJP and its sister organisations, the RSS and the VHP in India. Such organisations too highlight such "dif-ference" posing that material minded Europe can never reflect that so-called spiritual culture of India. Ethnic cleansing, exclusionary concepts are rooted in such "difference." Ideologues of post-modernism/ post-structuralism fulminate against all rationality, science and the rebel spirit grown out of the Renais-sance presumably to force us into the pre-modern world. But it is curious that they themselves are much too dependent on the luxuries of the West or the East aided by modern-facilities and state-of-the-art gadgets. Marxism condemns such uncritical worship of the past as conservation and hypocrisy while favouring critical assimilation of the best of the past and the present.

The communal Hindutva ideologues in India carry on an insidious propaganda that Hindus are turning into minority. The RSS supremo M. S. Gol-walkar's teachings were to see the "*difference"* with the Muslims and so if not physically, paralyse them economically and ostracise them socially. Such dan-gerous obsession with the notion of this "*difference"* and emphasizing it like something unchangeable and stable have always been menacing to all progres-sive people. Hitler's philosophical guru Nietzsche advocated eugenics and Hitler's eugenic sterilization victims included a part from tens of thousands of Jews, the Communists, gypsies, the mentally chal-

lenged, etc. Mrs. Indira Gandhi during the dark days of Emergency period in 1975-77 in the name of family planning through vasectomy killed 1,774 men primarily poor, overwhelmingly from the scheduled castes and minorities.[80]

What is ridiculous and illogical is that post-modernists/post structuralists are given to stretching things to an extreme point trampling upon common-sense and reality. Marxists allow space for "difference" positing it in proper perspective as they focus on identity. And all depends on the bedrock of the crucial question of people's interests and social progress. The post-modernist protagonists of "difference" absolutise it and thus abandon the very scope and concept of united struggles or cementing the unity of the wretched of the earth.

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80. *Hindustan Times*, Dec 19, 2002.

Chapter 12

Anti-revolutionary Discourse Theory

What unifies all trends of post-Modernism is that there can be no grand narrative about matter, life and society. They think that the Discourse that tries to bind everything under a single head is faulty Discourse. There is no master discourse in the World. If someone refers to Hegelian dialectics or Marxism as a grand discourse post-Modernists will reject it outright. For argument's sake, if there are separate discourses concerning feudalism, capitalism, etc. it is simply foolish to have a generalised discourse like historical materialism.

Post-Modernists think that in a society there exist multiple separate discourses of religion, caste, gender, family, etc. And in every discourse there will remain a hegemonistic part along with possibilities of generating one or more discourses. Through the deconstruction of hegemonistic discourse such counter discourses emerge. As for example in India the Dalits build up counter discourse against domination of the privileged. So also in the gender discourse men constitute the dominating discourse. In both cases the counter discourse of the Dalits or Women deconstructs the dominating discourse making room for democratic space of the Dalits or Women.

The relevant question comes up immediately as to the possibility of interrelation of unity or alliance

of all the dominated parts of various discourses. At this post-Modernists smell the tendency towards forming a meta-narrative. Thus while the discourse of men is deconstructed by discourse of women, even if the discourse of men is the discourse of working men it is also dominating. Post-modernists here adduce the argument that if efforts are made to unify on the basis of labour, feminism, etc. they will invariably turn into a sort of servility to the discourse of men.

The ideology of this Discourse accepts certain preconditions. Firstly, truth has no existence independent of Discourse. What dominating Discourse will pronounce as the truth that is truth. In the works of post-Modernists truth is text-based. In the 19th century such view was condemned as idealism by the materialist thinkers. Secondly, the multiple types of discourses as pointed to by the post-Modernists do not have any inter-relationship. They do so because they simply reject the rational efforts of the European Enlightenment period to establish cause-effect relationship in the material or animal world. Post-modernists don't bother as to why there exist gender, caste or such divisions in a society and why there is class division and such relevant questions. Their queries are confined to the genealogy of a particular Discourse. Whether inter-relationships can be found among the discourses or whether some discourse can be accorded the status of a fundamental or an unimportant one is not the concern of the post-modernists. In their consideration the efforts

at finding out such inter-relationships will impose determinism and essentialism. Actually, they announce, nothing can be determined by something else. They reject that the discourse of economy ultimately determines the discourse of politics. They do not consider it essential that the discourse of class will have any determining role in the law-making of a state. Instead of considering inter-relationship between the discourses, the post-modernists think it wise to address a Discourse which assumes some importance at a given moment. It is actually a policy meant for contingent demand. This does not mean the fading away of other discourses. They lose their importance for a temporary period.

However, it will be mistaken to think that like the Marxists post-Modernists also differentiate between primary and secondary importance of discourses. For the post-Modernists society itself is the arena of war for multiple constructions and deconstructions. In this war he who constructs a Discourse deconstructs it in another discourse. This refers to the multiple identities of the persons concerned. In this sense on one occasion the same category of people is both target of attack and targeting some aim.

Thus there is an unremitting war of all against all with no question of discrimination between important and unimportant aspects. It is downright anarchism. Actually the politics of post-Modernism is the politics of subversion. In a given period against a dominating Discourse there emerges a counter discourse through the

deconstruction of the former. However, the deconstruction of the dominant discourse by the dominated does not end repression or domination by a certain Discourse. Post-modernists generally agree that whatever discourse comes up displacing another discourse the erstwhile dominated now starts wielding power over others. So there is unending process of domination through power politics with no hope of emancipation. The space of democracy formed by the struggle of the counter discourse against a dominating discourse shall ultimately lead back to square one. So the discourse analysis passes into an anarchic state with the total neglect by post-Modernists to build up a concrete programme against such bleak prospect of humanity. Marxists also admit aspects of multiple identities but lay stress on essential aspects for the destruction of main sources of exploitation and domination taking into consideration inter-relations of various contradiction. Despite immense success in the Russian or Chinese Revolution there remained numerous loopholes as regards resolution of certain other contradiction in a proper way. But this does not teach us to reject the rich experiences of the socialist revolution and to go about courting anarchism.

While preaching discourses in a society based on power, post-Modernists conveniently avoid delving deeper into the facts that difference does not invariably mean bossing or domination and that a society

can move forward having many differences, some are open to change with fundamental changes in a society. This however, does not preclude the conscious efforts on the part of revolutionaries from the beginning to address various types of domination and exploitation while spearheading the attack against the principal forms of exploitation and domination. This was one of the crucial theoretical mistakes of the CPI and CPI(M) leadership to shelve struggles against caste system and such other questions with the fond hope that a socialist society shall automatically erase them from the Indian society. Such a fatalistic approach based on Discourse is clearly anti-Marxist, and hence harmful to the revolutionary struggle. It only poses a question whose post-modernist solution is embedded in anarchy, passivity and also running away from the actual struggle against any type of domination.

CHAPTER 13

CRITIQUE OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Post-colonial thought initiated by Edward Said is the last refuge of the post-modernist/post-structuralist trend fathered by Derrida, Foucault, etc. In *Orientalism* Said reduces the narrative of the convergence between colonial knowledge and colonial powers under "*Orientalist Discourse*" virtually banishing economic exploitation and political coercion. It is true that Edward Said brought to the center-stage the question of cultural imperialism, but the discursive theory takes us to subjective idealism. Even going beyond the age of modernism he discovered the whole literary tradition from Aeschylus to Edward Lane as European literature's complicity in inferiorization of the "*Orient.*" In the post-modernist frame he identified Enlightenment as a unified master sign of both *orientalism* and colonialism. This exaggerated and fabricated narrative, based on Discourse theory of Foucault leads to a sort of nationalism which encourages unequivocal worship of national tradition without any discrimination between colonialists and anti-colonialists in Europe and the reactions of various strata towards colonialism from diverse planes. When Said remarks that orientalism delivered the orient to colonialism it appears that colonialism starts as a product of orientalism itself—a project which Said traces from Aeschylus to inferiorize the orient preceding actual

colonization. Thus imperialist ideology is nothing but some sort of writing. Aijaz Ahmad shows that using Derridean idea of Identity and Difference, Said reaches a strange position. Said wants to show that the West has needed to constitute the orient as its other in order to constitute itself and its own subject position. Ahmad observes:

> ...[T]his idea of constituting Identity through Difference points, again not to the realm of political economy—not to those other social materialistics of a non-discursive kind—wherein colonialization may be seen as a process of capitalist accumulation, but to a necessity which arises within discourse and always been there at the origin of discourse, so that not only is the modern orientalist presumably already there in Dante and Euripides but modern imperialism itself appears to be an effect that arises, if not naturally, from the necessary practices of discourse.[81]

In his height of absurdity Foucault located Marx firmly within the boundaries what he called "western episteme" considering that Marxian thought is framed entirely by the discourse of political economy falling within that episteme. Similarly Said discovered Marx in the oriental discourse. It is down-

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81. Aijaz Ahmad, *Theory Classes Nations Literatures,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p. 182.

right nonsense and cannot be established even by any conceivable way that Marx was an Orientalist and justified colonisation by European imperialist powers. Marx not only disdainfully remarked against "*Lousy orientalist,*" the whole body of Marx's writings is directed against capital and colonisers' loot and destruction of the East. It is true that in his early journalistic writing—and Said has solely depended on it harping on a comment—Marx observed that the laying of railways and other measures brought about a churning in the otherwise backward, stagnant society of orthodoxy. Marx's "favourable" opinion flashed and ended there. And with the unfolding days Marx brilliantly and cogently portrayed with glaring facts the horrible scenario under the wheels of the imperialist juggernaut throughout the East.

The so-called Colonialist Discourse is basically weak and partial to the point of ignoring the highly important constituents of colonialism, its economic exploitation and massive politico-administrative set-up.

When Foucault's followers stick to so-called "*colonial Discourse Analysis*" it is made clear that we are constituted by colonialism, the only Discourse that really matters is the Discourse of the colonialist. Such people reject all the existing methods in history writing, going far beyond the empirical historian's usual interrogation of and scepticism about the available evidence and the accepted mode of interpretation: and they enter the Nietzschean world of

question not merely positivist construction but the very facility of facts. Nietzsche firmly announced: "…*[T]ruths are illusions about which one has forgotten that is what they are.*"[82]

The Nietzschean fulmination against the image of language as the enemy of experience and that representation through language is always—already a misrepresentation—only lead one to the rejection of truthful human communication. Hence, in this sense any truthful statement in history writing is always prejudiced by the very nature of the language itself. It is true that words do not necessarily perfectly represent something. There is no leafiness in the word "leaf" but it is human experience and socially accepted word of representation of the leaf. The Nietzschean rejection of this very image of the enemy of experience and such assertion that representation is always—already a misrepresentation reject forthwith the possibility of human communication. In relation to the knowledge of history, then this consideration of such image of human communication as a ruse of illusory subjectivity precludes the possibility of reconstruction of history through writing using a language. Such anarchic views leads nowhere and our post-modernists are also at a loss during making a statement with the help of the socially accepted language itself.

Post-structuralists/post-modernists are now vocal protagonists of the colonial discourse. It refers

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82. Quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 203

to the group of texts, both literary and non-literary, which were produced by the British writers during the British colonial period. The Subaltern Studies in India now refers to discursive regimes of power to co-opt Indian social classes and thus shift the blame for the Subalterns' failure in India on to the British, the ultimate authors of the discourse of colonial power. Thus the powerful domains of imperialist discourse were posed as all-powerful in respect of the vanquished subalterns in India. And soon the original marginalised Subalterns lost priority in such studies in order to study the discourses of the elite. The Subaltern Studies Collective's shift from Marx to Foucault led it to all-pervasive "colonial discourse" making colonialism ultimately the sole actor in Indian history. Hence the supposedly long slumbering India also was awakened by the fruits of civilization from the west with colonialism remoulding or assigning meanings to indigenous structures like caste, gender or class and cutting up Indian society into mutually opposed blocks of religion, tribe or caste. Thus Foucaultian or post-Modernist influence ultimately turns Subaltern Studies into a study of the elite with the acceptance of the coloniser British as the principal actors on their own right.

With Foucault's denunciation of the Western episteme or Derrida's denunciations of the trans-historical Logos nothing remains outside the epistemic Power, logo-centric thought, no classes, no gender, not even history, no site of overall resistance, no

prospect of human emancipation. With the oriental discourse communalism can now be considered alone as a result of Orientalism and colonial construction; caste itself can be portrayed as a fabrication primarily of the Population Surveys and Census Reports, and so on.

Even Edward Said, the Foucault follower had this to say later:

> Foucault's eagerness not to fall into Marxist economism causes him to obliterate the role of classes, the role of economics, the role of insurgency and rebellion in the societies he discusses...[83]

The post-colonial theory bases itself on the post-modernist frame, which cries hoarse that no "*final vocabulary*" can be shown to be rationally superior. Richard Rorty in this fashion expresses himself as sentimentally patriot about the USA, willing to grant that it could slide into Fascism at any time, but he is proud of its past and guardedly hopeful about the future.[84] Homi Bhabha, the post-colonial theorist, makes it clear in his book *The Location of Culture* the additional aspect in this approach:

> Driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity—rather than by the failures of logocentrism—I have

83. Edward Said, *World, the Text and the Critic*, pp. 244-246. Quoted in Aijaz Ahmad, in *Theory, Classes…,* ibid*,* p. 199.

84. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989.

> tried... to revise the known, to rename the post-modern from the position of the post-colonial.[85]

In fact the language metaphor "*to provide a social imagery that is based on the articulation of history and culture"* stands as fundamental of post-modernists and is faithfully pursued by such post-colonialists. Such fundamental comes to the fore as their master concept of ambivalence characteristic of Lacanian theorizing—the ambivalence constituting the colonial discourse. Homi Bhabha echoes the post-modernist view:

> ...[C]olonial discourse is an apparatus of power, turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences.[86]

It appears that in such studies the intrinsic heterogeneity of discourses is a consequence of "*the structure of symbolic representation*." Cultural differences between the coloniser and the colonized turns out to be Derridean difference, the endless process of displacement from one signifier to another, in which a transcendental signified that would stop this flight of meaning is at once constantly posited and indefinitely deferred. Homi Bhabha disclosed the fact quite bluntly:

> ...[I]f the interest of post-modernism is

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85. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London 1994, p. 175.
86. Ibid, p. 70.

limited to a celebration of the fragmentation of the "grand narrative" of post-enlightenment rationalism then for all its intellectual excitement it remains a profoundly parochial enterprise.[87]

And in reality Bhabha remains within the four walls of post-modernism. Ranajit Guha, the Guru of Subaltern Studies group in his well-known book *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* brought to the centre stage the role of rumour, symbols, territoriality, etc. in graphic details obviously at the cost of the fundamentals of colonial exploitation that lay behind the resistances and. revolts. Homi Bhabha seizes on Guha's discussion of rumour helping precipitate the revolts. For Bhabha:

[T]he indeterminate circulation of meaning as rumour or conspiracy, with a pervasive, psychic effects of panic, constitutes the inter-subjective realm of revolt and resistance.[88]

Thus we are taken to the absurd height by drawing on Guha's illustration of the role of rumour or of sending "chapati" from one village to the other as a symbolic signal for the circulation of "insurgency." Bhabha writes:

...[T]he re-inscription of a traditional system of organisation through the disturbance, or interruption of the circulation

87. Ibid, p. 4.
88. Homi Bhabha, ibid, p. 200.

of the cultural codes… bears a marked
similarity to the conjunctural history of
the Mutiny.[89]

Thus the great earth-shaking rebellion of 1857
against British imperialism is conceptualized primarily in terms of an "*interruption*" of the signifying chain. If revolts are explained fundamentally in terms of developing "familiar symbol" as chapati into an "*unfamiliar social significance as sign*" through a transformation of the temporality of its presentation, this history or making history is reduced to an exercise merely in such transformation. Marxism obviously rejects such a superficial academic approach, hesitant to go at the roots. The early claim of subaltern studies to situate writing within the collective reflection of the Indian left in order to highlight the achievements and limitations of great anti-imperialist struggles of the subaltern masses is itself a history now.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the subaltern theorist and translator of Derrida's book *Of Gramatology* explains in 1988:

> …[T]heir work presupposes that the entire socials, at least in so far as it is the object of their study, is what Nietzsche would call a fortgesetzte zeichenkette—a "continuous sign-chain." The possibility of action lies in its dynamics of the disruption of the object, the breaking and relinking of

89. Homi Bhabha, ibid, p. 202.

> the chain. The line of argument does not
> set consciousness over against the socius,
> but see it as itself constituted us and on a
> semiotic chain.[90]

The same refrain of culture or nature or language constituting us, what Spivak found in the perspective of Subaltern Studies, Bhabha echoes it when he discovers the Great Revolt of 1857 is the "*disruption*" of the *"semiotic chain,"* a chain that binds not only human consciousness but also the social in its entirety. What is dangerous is the central concept that rebellion is the disruption of signifying chain. Thus Bhabha's post-colonial theory is an idealist reduction of the social to the semiotic and a tunnel-view of politics. It is in order to state what Edward Said had to self-critically comment later virtually rejecting the opposition to totality. He asserted:

> …[I]f subaltern is constituted to be only
> a separatist enterprise much as early fem-
> inine writing was based on the notion
> that women had a voice or room of their
> own, entirely separate from the masculine
> domain—then it must run the risk of just
> being a mirror opposite [of] the writing
> whose tyranny it disputes. It is also likely
> to be as exclusivist, as limited, provincial
> and discriminatory in its suppression and

90. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Guha and Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, p. 5.

repression as the master discourses of colonialism and elitism. In fact, as Guha [Ranajit Guha] shows, the subaltern alternative is an integrative, for all gaps, the lapses and ignorance of which it is so conscious. Its claim that by being subalternist it can see the whole experience of India resistance to colonialism more fairly than the partial histories provided by a handful of dominant native leaders or colonial historians...[91]

It is self-explanatory that Said now rejects the attempt to base the critical theory on a binary opposition between dominant and subaltern groups; at the same time he seems to be in favour of a totalizing perspective for comprehending the nature and means of turning upside down the relations of oppression. What glaringly comes to the fore is that the so-called post-colonial thought born out of and nurtured by post-modernist philosophical foundation based on Nietzsche's metaphysics of power is a pure and simple attempt at depoliticization of theory as appears in Foucault's last writings of an "*aesthetics of existence*" implying that political action be redirected away from any intervention in the public sphere towards restyling of the self. It is a thought, which destroys the attempts at resistance, not to speak of emancipation. Foucault, the mentor of

91. Edward Said, *Foreword*, in Guha and Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ibid, p. viii.

post-modernist/post-colonial theorists like Edward Said was later criticised by none but Said himself.

CHAPTER 14

AGAINST UNILINEAR VIEW

Marxism does not endorse a unilinear process of social development. A sound familiarity with the works of originator of Marxism—obviously not partial familiarity with two or three sentences taken out of their vast works—will enlighten the reader how Marx substantiated, revised and even abandoned some of his observations made in early life with the increasing accumulation of newer facts in the course of his long life. It is also true that the unilinear model for all societies i.e. Primitive Society, Slavery, Feudalism, and Capitalism, gained currency in the international Marxist circle during the 30s and 40s of the last century. And as Marxists are not fundamentalists they debated this model with the appearance of Marx's *Grundrisse* and his notes on India, Algeria, Sri Lanka, etc written in his last life. Marx wrote his two famous papers, *The British Rule in India* and *The Future Results of the British Rule in India* in 1853 based on British parliamentary papers, Francois Bernier's memoirs of his travels and ex-colonial officers' reports on the India socio-economic system. The concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production formulated in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* was the result of his early studies. That Marx did not have in his mind a unilinear or Western model for countries like India is crystal clear from his for-

mulation of the Asiatic Mode. The Asiatic Mode was marked by self-sufficient village communities, the absence or near-absence of commodity production, repressive "oriental despotic" state, absence of private property in land, etc. However, it was Marx who did not cling to old ideas unflinchingly with the unearthing of newer facts, with the re-opening of debate on pre-colonial Indian society during the praparetion of the second and the last volume of *Capital.* Between 1879 and 1880, Marx wrote *Notes on Kovalevsky* and scrupulously detailed *Notes on Indian History*. In 1881 when he replied to the letter of Vera I. Zasulich, he compiled his notes on J. B. Phear's and Henry S. Maine's books on India. In the later years we can identify a clear change in the way Marx perceived Indian society. Yet Marx, as some Marxist scholars go on record, never, even in his later years, recognised the West European type of feudalism in India.[92] It must be kept in mind that Baden-Powell's more reliable studies on Indian land system and society, the land system of British India, *Indian Village Community* saw the light of the day after Marx's death.

If Marx accepted one thing common to all societies it was the labour process. Marx said that for

92. Osamu Kondo, *Feudal Social Formation in Indian History in the Making of History*, (eds.) K. N. Panikkar, Terence J. Byres, Utsa Patnaik, Tulika, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 57-58; Diptendra Banerjee (ed.), *Marxian Theory and the Third World,* Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1985; Daniel Thorner, *Feudalism in India, the shaping of Modern India*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, p. 288.

all societies there is: *"…[T]he labour process independently of any specific social formation"* and it is *"the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore… common to all forms of society in which human beings live."*[93]

Marxists like Lenin, Mao, et al. rebuffed the unilinear model to make revolution in their respective countries. If unilinear trend prescribing a single-way of progress in history, downplaying the specificities of the societies concerned, made its presence in the international Marxist movement on certain occasions, it did not surely emerge from liberation pessimism of the post-modernists bitterly rejecting any model of revolution for destroying the existing system of human bondage. 'Let hundred flowers blossom' was the clarion call of Mao after the revolution and it had its results too. We admit that a wrong trend supposing to cast all into a single mould ignoring differences or mechanically applying a fixed belief has had its negative impact on the Marxist movement. In the future socialist society the question of people's democracy in various specific features and contradictions must be accorded paramount importance drawing lessons from the failures of the earlier socialist systems.

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93. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Harmondsworth, 1976, pp. 283, 290. Quoted in Terrell Carver, *Marx and Non-European Development*, in Diptendra Banerjee (ed.) *Marxian Theory and The Third World*, Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1985, p. 45.

CHAPTER 15

CAUSE AND EFFECT AND IDEALIST CRITIQUE OF POST-MODERNISTS/POST-STRUCTURALISTS

Post-modernism rejects categories like cause and effect. Marxism believes that cause always precedes effect, but succession in time is not the adequate sign of cause. For example, day follows night, but night is not the cause of day. Here comes the question of rotation of the earth. No phenomenon exists or can exist without cause, for everything has its cause. Causality is inherent in reality and is discovered by man in the process of cognition and practical activity.

When post-modernists reject cause and effect they in fact reject all scientific experiences so far. This leads to one sort of nihilism, which does not seek any reason or cause behind any result. They think that no cause can be studied perfectly. Such a view leads us to nowhere before any incoming problems. We need to be left with only results, with all uncertainty and we should never try to recreate anything knowing the inherent laws. This is post-modernism.

Post-modernism rejects categories like cause and effect but Marxists believe that the categories of Marxist dialectics are a result, generalisation of the centuries-old experience of people, of their labour and knowledge. In course of his practical activity

man, coming in contact with, and cognizing objects and phenomena of the world, has singled out their essential, general features and fixed the results in categories, concepts. Lenin wrote:

> Instinctive man, the savage, does not distinguish himself from nature. Conscious man does distinguish: categories are stages of distinguishing, i.e., of cognizing the world.[94]

Categories like cause and effect are stepping stones of knowledge to help people to find their way in the intricate web of phenomena in nature and society, to reveal the interconnection and interdependence of things, the definite order and the law-governed character of their development and to choose the right course of practical activity.

Marxism rejects idealism which denies the objective character of categories. Kant thought that before man begins to know the world his consciousness contains categories of causality, necessity, chance, etc. With the help of which he allegedly introduces order into the chaotic world of natural phenomena. Marxism refutes such a view and posits categories in the realm of objective reality. Secondly, categories are interconnected, changeable and mobile, being reflection of the material world, the universal connections and interactions of its objects and phenomena. The connection of categories is so close that under certain conditions they can turn one into the

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94. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38, p. 93.

another. Thus cause becomes effect and vice versa, necessity becomes chance and so on.

Post-modernism/post-structuralism rejects three pillars of Marxism, its epistemology, social totality and class. It rejects causality involving the elements of cause and effect. It states that "cause producing effects"—this sequential and logical order is the fundamental principle of the essentialist concept of causality. By essentialism it is meant, they argue, the hierarchical oppositions between reality and appearance, between essence and accident, between economic and non-economic, between inside and outside and so on. The post-modern/post-structuralist trend rejects prioritising one against the other considering such acts as essentialist. Thus, it rejects causality behind effects or for that matter the Hegelian thesis—antithesis—synthesis triad. Derrida argues that elements in a structure having hierarchised i.e. some having more importance than the other is, what he calls, logocentrism. Derrida thus attacks such logo centrism targeting: (1) the prior or originary element—that which causes—is autonomous. (2) An element is determined by the other elements. (3) The factor, like the forces of production, that is considered to be the most important factor. Post-modernists/post-structuralists reject any foundational concept, originary base, the causation of one elements having privileged position over the causation of other elements, etc. They smell essentialism, "logocentrism," reductionism, etc. in cause-effect, in the stress on principal contradiction,

principal aspects of a contradiction and on all such Marxist fundamentals.

Cause and effect have a dialectical relation in which one influences the other. The superstructure (effect) comprising political, moral, religious, cultural aspects are generally the products of the mode of production (cause) continuously exerting impact on the cause. Cause and effect can also mutually change their positions. The cause in one context can become effect in some other context. Effect also can turn into cause. From the Marxist point of totality, it is found that every cause can be an effect and every effect can be a cause. Marxism also holds the view on the presence of internal cause, basic causes and principal cause. There is difference between the complete cause and the specific cause. The former is the sum total of all the circumstances, the presence of which necessarily gives rise to the effect. The specific cause is the sum total of circumstances, the presence of which (with the presence of many other circumstances already present in the given situation even before the conditions for the action of the cause) leads to the appearance of the effect. The establishment of a complete cause is possible in comparatively simple cases and generally scientific investigation proceeds towards the comprehension of the specific causes of the phenomenon.

Post-modernists reject the question of cause causing effect. They often refer to their guru Nietzsche who in his *The Will to Power* gives the example of pin and pain. I feel pain. Immediately, I look for

a cause, i.e. the pin. Thus pin is the cause, pain is effect. Nietzsche changes the order. He says that my experience of pain causes me to look for the cause (pin), thus causes the production cause. Pain becomes the cause while pin the effect of the cause. This way Nietzsche wants to prove that the cause becomes the effect, while effect the cause. With this example, Nietzsche and his followers claim to have destroyed the cause-effect sequence and also the position of origin. This is metaphysics, simple and pure, an obstinate effort to dismiss the cause-effect sequence. Instead of a pin if we take a mosquito bite/snake-bite and the resultant painful suffering/ death, our post-modernist idealist doctor with his Nietzschean view will pinpoint the latter as the cause of the former and burst into frenzied glee for the supposed, dismissal of the point of origin. Such absurd idealist view will in turn exonerate impe-rialists, capitalists, etc. as cause for plunders and exploitation. In the name of logo centrism or essen-tialism such idealist thinkers reject giving privileged status to certain factors/elements and thus dismiss the Marxian dialectical view that the causative fac-tors, like the forces of production and relations of production, generally play a more important role than other elements in the socio-economic process. They are stubborn in their allowing equal status to all elements with the rejection of the cause-effect sequence. This is also Derridean deconstruction, the deconstruction of dependency, origin and founda-tion. Against such an absurd view of befogging the

socio-economic process, Marxism holds that there are both internal and external contradictions with the internal *generally* remaining as basic. Nevertheless, at times external contradiction plays a decisive role. It is not the role of the social scientist to leave the stage imparting equal importance to all the factors in a given moment; rather it is his duty to study the contradictions in order to grasp the principal, main and less important contradictions at a given moment. In the name of reversal cause-effect sequence, giving equal status to all the factors and dismissing the originary point, post-modernists/post-structuralists actually want us to keep our eyes closed to the principal imperialist powers, the basic classes of revolution, the principal contradiction in a country in a given period, etc. Such views can raise a furore over a tea cup in a coffee house or academic institution, but becomes dangerous opium in the real life struggle of the masses.

Chapter 16

Post-Modern Negative Impact on the Study of Science

Post-modernism has left its extremely narrow, irrational, parochial impact on the question of studying modern science. The scientific tradition of thinking about the coinciding of reality and truth is challenged. The set of doctrines often referred to as "social construction of science" or "sociology of scientific knowledge" claims that like any other way of knowing, scientific methods are wholly relative to a theoretical framework and a world-view: we know what we ourselves construct and there can be no justification that our constructs can progressively come to map the world as it really is. Thus truth is a matter of how we "*garland consensus with authority.*"[95] By this, facts once seen as due to the world's own determination are instead seen as projections upon a much thinner world by the cultural practices of communities of inquirers. This way culture and power get a privileged position over each and every scientific enquiry. Meera Nanda has summed up such views from writings of various authors, which can be paraphrased as (1) What makes a belief true is not in correspondence with an element of reality, but its adoption and authentication by the rele-

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95. David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, Chicago, p. 42; Quoted in Meera Nanda, *Restoring the Real: Rethinking Social Constructivist Theories of Science,* In *Socialist Register*, 1997, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1997, p. 302.

vant community of enquirers. (2) Science is socially located praxis that creates the reality it describes; it is not at all a detached description of a pre-existing reality external to its own practice. Thus science does not just describe or unravel "facts," but actually constructs them through the active, culturally and socially situated choices scientists make in the laboratory. (3) Such theories admit of no analytical distinctions between knowledge and society, the cognitive dimension and the socio-cultural dimension: people's knowledge of the world and their organisation of life in the world constitute each other, the two are "co-produced." With such views theorists "*tend to deny any meaningful distinction between what is inside and outside of science and between things natural and social.*"[96] Many post-modernists/ post-colonial critics of modern science consider that the challenge to the traditional order being armed with "Western Science" is an act of conspiracy against the local tradition. They consider such rational, scientific minded people as "*internal colonizers*" bringing the diverse local narratives under the sway of a Eurocentric meta-narrative. Foucault, Rorty, et al. guide them to reject such efforts. This approach is basically premised on the post-modernist concept of discursive knowledge, power and inaccessibility of reality. The concentrated expression of this post-modern view has been projected by Alan Sokal, a theoretical physicist at New York

96. Meera Nanda, ibid, p. 303.

University, who strung together the statements of post-modern theorists like Derrida, Lacan, Lyotard *et al.* to declare how post-modern social theory has shown that, the reality physicists study is a social and linguistic construct.[97]

Under the post-modernist influence this extreme view in the name of "*social construction of science*" or "*sociology of scientific knowledge*" denies that scientific facts have any necessary relation to casual processes and theoretical entities, which they claim to describe. This new breed of theorists regards science as mere construction but not a discovery of reality. Thus our knowledge is said to be our own construction and so fails to present the reality itself. Post-modernism/post-structuralism dismisses truth and sermonises that truth is nothing but our acceptance of it with authority.

It goes without saying that science has been often misused and scientists have shown biases and material interests to impose the existing social order upon the order of nature. This is some scientists' bid for naturalization of an unequal order. Recent history testifies to the abominable fact how the majority of U.S. physicists were pressed into service for the gargantuan programme of Star Wars in the 1980s. It is a fact that in the name of research and development millions of dollars have been spent in the USA alone and a huge amount of it has gone towards building up sophisticated lethal weapons. Also in the field of

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97. Meera Nanda, ibid, footnote, p. 346.

medical sciences, notwithstanding its big advances, it has been vulgarised and debased due to the maniacal drive for profits, creating an atmosphere amongst the post-modernists to negate allopathy totally—taking the idealisation of herbal treatment to extreme levels. It was in Mao's China where aq more rational approach was adopted of combining the two—i.e. using the best in allopathy, together with maximum efforts to advance indigenous remedies.

So, the question comes up whether we can dismiss or impute an absolutely negative role to science and that scientists always and on all occasions working at the diktat of the powers that be. When Bernal writes that under colonial rule Indian scientists must "*be subjected to the patronizing and insulting habits of the English to their subject races*"[98] should we not invariably consider the scientific space created outside and against the hassles and impediments under the imperialist system had a different role. It was definitely difficult but was presumably natural to develop dialectical opposition to colonial science.

India has a long tradition in medical science. Ancient tribes invented the primary method of alleviation of various maladies obviously through exclusive experiment towards a scientific way of treatment. The archaeology of medicines that we inherit from the past does not necessarily justify the Foucaultian concept of power always at work

98. J. D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, Routledge, London, 1939, p. 208.

towards scientific researches whatever may be their level. Traditional medicines, written and unwritten, have a very long history. The use of neem, turmeric and numerous things as medicines has a very very long history in India, originating at a time even remotely can be conceivable as evolved in the arenas of powers. What is very much known that practising medical men or researchers on human body were looked down upon by the Brahministic big and small rulers in India. The great pioneer in the medical science in Europe, Hippocrates had to practise stealthily lest he should pollute others and draw the ire of the controllers of society. The examples are cited in order to refute the claim of post-modernism/post-structuralism that science is always a tool in the hands of the powers that be.

Under the British colonial system there always remained a dilemma, western science was introduced without any distinct science policy along with structural limitations for research and development. The British Govt. sponsored science for the very reason of its existence; geography, geology, botany, zoology, archaeology, medicine and even astronomy were introduced primarily on the grounds of political and commercial gains.[99] To combat the shameless apathy of the imperialist rulers towards scientific education, Indian scientists' inventions in various fields was a certain amount of defiance. But in general what was transplanted in Indian society

99. R. K. Kochhar, *Science as a Tool in British India*, EPW, August 1993.

as science was not for the indigenous social needs but for imperialism itself. Yet one can not dismiss J. C. Bose's contributions in the field of science and its popularization against enforced difficulties under the colonial regime. Against colonial science there emerged a counter trend. One historian recorded the role of a pioneer of technology in 19th century Bengal, Sitanath Ghosh for his invention of the cotton spindle of a new type, an air-pump, a power loom, a weaving machine, a wheat pounding mill, a mechanical plough, etc. Those inventions, however, were not produced on a commercial scale.[100]

While denouncing positivism Bernal attempted to present a social responsibility to the scientists. He was also hopeful that an appreciation of historical relation of science and society by the scientists would make it possible for them to counter the efforts of those who misuse science.

Natural philosophy fragmented into separate domains of enquiry like natural and human science only in the 17th century. And only at this crucial period science assumed an independent status. With the emergence of capitalist society, the increasing connection between science and the production process and research through funding science, a tendency becomes clear: science is used for profits and fabrication. And designing tools of Darwin,

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100. Chittabrata Palit, *Sitanath Ghosh the Forgotten Pioneer of Technology in Bengal*, In *Science, Technology, Medicine and Environment in India*, (eds.) Chittabrata Palit, Amit Bhattacharya, Bibhasa, Calcutta, 1988, pp. 89-98.

Newton, Faraday, et al., were driven by the internal momentum of science getting inspired from within the tradition of science itself. It is scientists' motivation to fathom how nature works and how to do things more and more easily. And the long technical tradition is nurtured by the scientific tradition. But we cannot but admit that the most flourishing period of science coexists with flourishing economic activities and technical advance.

Marxism strongly refutes the sweeping conclusion of this idealist doctrine that there is always a merging and mutual constitution of the social order and the order of knowledge. If it is accepted that the content of natural sciences is not merely conditioned but constituted by the culturally endorsed social practices, the entire scientific knowledge turns into a matter of prevailing and ever changing conventions. Then there remains no necessary relation with the natural order, nor the critical relation with the social order. When this extremely idealist doctrine dishes out the view that reality is nothing but a constructed image, we are then left with no way out of this created image to verify our findings and beliefs in relation to the objective reality. Also if it is taken for granted that all rational views and practices work within the four walls of the power nexus and inevitable biases then we are reduced to mere programmed robots which always fail to do creative work or get at the objective reality.

It is a fact that sometimes what is passed for truth is created by the powers that be with defi-

nite interests, but these Foucault followers go to extremes by declaring that truth is always and on all occasions is the creation of power. They reject the possibility of forming knowledge transcending the barriers imposed by culture, local contexts and power. Such orthodox doctrines in the post-modernist heritage, would then dismiss the possibility of People's Science movements being carried on by various organisations in India and other countries making the people aware of irrational ideas and practices rooted in societies and the possibility of overhauling the system of exploitation being armed with the findings of science. It must be kept in mind that people, freed of superstitions and abominable practices, and the organisations working at the grass roots with rational, scientific consciousness are the actual force to expose the anti-social scientists power-broker nexus against human civilization itself.

Simultaneously it is absolutely wrong to reject forever and for all times scientific findings that have any inherent scope and possibility of universal application. If the USA and some other powers showing off their infinite arrogance and possessiveness to declare ban on the acquisition of atomic knowledge developed by physicists in other countries is blown-up to equate with all instances of scientific findings, then we have to reject every invention of science as anti-people. History, however, testifies to the universality of scientific findings in numberless instances. Those hypocritical critics of science try to project themselves as truly opposed to

western imperialism by equating the whole of modern science coming from Europe as a sign of western imperialistic domination. This sermonisation is also a narrow, reductionist notion conveniently evading to discriminate between the elements of domination and the contributions of science to people's life. They also reject the possibility of "*Trans cultural appropriation of the methods, theories and world view of modern science.*" Scientific knowledge proceeds through continuous self-correction in the light of fresh findings from the natural order. But those so-called pundits hold that the evidence from nature can never be free from contextual values and the scientists' cultural moorings. The ever-changing scientific theories and rival theories in similar contextual and cultural situations substantially belie such fixed and extremely irrational ideas. We do not dismiss the fact that cultural meanings and social power play an important role even in the field of science. But we reject such views that scientific rationality is solely or ultimately decided by them and that all the reality we can ever really reach is the reality that is internal to our system of representation in the post-modernist/post-structuralist sense. Thus in that sense such representations are merely our constituted reality and moving towards truth is an illusory venture. In the same fashion things remaining outside our representation are things-in-themselves as Kantian agnosticism explained. Marxism is not positivism but considers truth as relative. This extremely narrow view under post-modernist

influence rejects the boundary line between science and superstition and thoroughly dismisses any possibility of truth outside the power structure. This dangerous trend reaches its nadir through the relativistic logic of post-modernism in the writing of physicist Alan Sokal. He writes:

> It has become increasingly apparent that physical "reality," no less than social "reality" is at bottom a social and linguistic construct, that scientific "knowledge," far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it, that truth claims of science are inherently theory laden, and the discourse of the scientific community.[101]

It is one type of agnosticism separating substance from appearance. It limits science, rejects logical thought, and distracts attention from cognition of the objective laws of nature and society. The best refutation of such superficial view is practice and material production. Kant differentiated between real ground and logical grounds. In his early works he restricted formal deductive methods of thinking in favour of experience. Ultimately Kant was led to agnosticism stating that the nature of things as

101. *Alan Sokal's writing* In A Callari and D. Ruccolo, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover and London, 1961; Quoted in Meera Nanda, *Restoring the Real: Rethinking Social Constructivist Theories of Science*, In *Socialist Register*, 1997, ibid.

they exist of themselves in principle is accessible to human knowledge. To him true theoretical knowledge is possible only in mathematics and natural science. And it is determined by the fact that in man's mind there are apriori forms of sensuous contemplation of reason and there is a connection between sensuous contemplation and the concept of reason. In Kant's view sensation stems from the action of an unknowable "*thing-in-itself*" on the sense organs as ordered by means of a priori forms of sensibility (space and time) and reason (categories of unity, plurality, causality, possibility, necessity and other). He also believed that striving for absolute knowledge is rooted in reason. Man's reason thus seeks to solve the problem. He accepted God as necessary postulate of faith, on which the moral order of the world rests. Marx and Engel's exposed the idealist contradictoriness in Kant and in his philosophy of thing-ish-ness and idealist view on reason. Hegel believed that reason does not go beyond static definiteness, abstract identity, abstract universality fixed opposites separated from one another (essence and appearance, necessity and chance, life and death, etc.)

Discursive or simple reason-based thought is not enough, it is merely the necessary step which allows one to rise higher, towards the intelligible forms of cognition. The dialectical negative-intelligible aspect of thought resolves the problem of one-sided and limited definitions of reason. Cognition is a dialectical process having different stages

of development. It starts from "*living perception*" bringing human beings to external qualities of objects. The data of "*living perception,*" experience are processed and generalised by their higher cognitive ability, abstract-logical thought which forms concepts. The logical activity of thought is affected in various forms: induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, construction of hypothesis and theories. Yet this creates only subjective ideas, yet to become the objective truth. Truth is arrived at by a process by removing error, and limited by the given stage of development in technological level, potentialities of production and such other factors. Here lies the strength of Marxism and baselessness of the post-modernist attack against all rationality, not to speak of the absence of a verifiable principle of practice in the dictionary of that idealist trend.

Popper placed his non-relativist view on the progress in science by referring its movement closer and closer to truth through successive falsification. T. S. Kuhn criticised it by positing both continuities and discontinuities in the evolutionary process of science with the absorption of earlier ideas and newer findings.[102] Many later writers like Richard Boyd, Philip Kitcher, etc. while admitting the role of contextuality of knowledge attempted to show that this problem can be overcome to a great degree.[103]

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102. T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

103. Richard Boyd, *Constructivism, Realism and Philosophical Method*, In John Earman (ed.), *Inference, Explanation*

To end this part, it is necessary to fight tooth and nail the gigantic state apparatus exploiting and utilising science against humanity. Simultaneously we must expose and lay bare the haughty fad of the pretentious post-modernists/post-structuralists to dismiss science per se as internal to our system of representation, discursive and always remaining within the bounds of power and culture. What is needed is to put science in use for the people's needs.

and Other Philosophical Frustrations: Essays in the Philosophy of Science, Berkley, 1992, Philip Kitcher, *The Advancement of Science: Science Without Legend, Objectivity Without Illusions*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Chapter 17

Post-Modernism/Post-Structuralism, a New Fad

Anthony Giddens uses terms like "radical," "high," or "late" modernity to describe modernity in order to indicate that the present modernity is continuous with the early stage.[104] Jürgen Habermas sees modernity as an "unfinished project," conceding the continuation of the modern world.[105] By now "*the new fad (Post-modernism) disappeared into the whirl of cultural fashion*."[106] Kellner also states that it is the hottest game in town. Smart has differentiated among extreme post-modernism represented by Jean Baudrillard and Arthur Kroker; the post-modernist position taken by Fredric Jameson, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe having some sort of inclination to Marxism consider post-modernism as growing out of and continuous with modernism, and finally the position as adopted by Smart himself views post-modernism not as a separate epoch but continually pointing out the limitations of modernism.[107]

104. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1991.

105. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987.

106. Douglas Kellner, Introduction, In Douglas Kellner(ed), *Post-modernism, Jameson, Critique*, Washington, D. C., pp. 1-2.

107. Barry Smart, *Post-modernity*, Routledge, London,

Derrida opposed structuralism and reduced language to "writing." While in his theory of deconstruction there remained a focus on language, writing was not supposed to be a structure. In Derrida's hands the stability and order of the language system turns into disorderly and unstable. Secondly, the underlying laws of language as was found by Saussure were gone in Derrida's technique. Derrida's objective is to strongly oppose logocentrism (the search for a universal system of thought expressing truth, beautiful, etc.). Derrida believes that logocentrism, since Plato, has caused closure, repression which needs to be deconstructed by freeing writing from things that enslave it. Derrida brings in the notion of the traditional theological stage present for centuries governed by authors and directors. However, the alternative stage in the Derridean scheme, with "free" actors or writers with no role of "dictators" appears to be a vague and anarchic. Here also comes the post structuralist/post-modernist argument of "decentering" allowing actors a sort of freedom of play, open-ended position. Actually speaking, in the words of George Ritzer:

> Having debunked authority, in the end Derrida leaves us without an answer; in fact, there is no single answer…[108]

In his effort at attacking the "metaphysics of

1993.

108. George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, The Mc Graw Hill Companies, INC, Singapore, 1996, p.598.

presence" Derrida takes recourse to what Martin Jay calls "carnivalesque play of language":

> This play of Deconstruction constitutive of signification necessarily involves both the disruption of presence, which is always part of a chain of substitution which transcend it, and the reference to presence, but a presence which can never fully be achieved but is constantly deferred. Difference is thus "the obliterated origin of absence and presence." Difference can only be conceptualized by means of a language which necessarily, by virtue of the nature of difference, itself, involves the metaphysics of presence: since it is ontologically prior to both presence and absence, is therefore unknowable. From this contradictions springs the practice of deconstruction which involves contesting the metaphysics of presence on its own terrain—a terrain from which there is (in) any case no escape…[109]

This is a critique from a Marxist and it strikes at the very root of the Deconstruction theory. Actually speaking Derrida's focus on differentiation implies either nostalgia for a lost unity or conversely a utopian hope for a future one. This utopian hope induces him groping for a "*pure*" word, the origi-

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109. Alex Callinicos, *Against Post-modernism, a Marxist Critique*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U. K., 1996, p. 75.

nal word, from which supposedly emanated all the words. It sounds like the word or original word in Hindu mythology "Om"—word as pure as God. Such flight to the so-called first principle is nothing but a romantic, nostalgic exercise. It is what some critics found a search for "transcendental consciousness." Many writers have found in Derrida's argument strong affinity with the German idealist tradition. It appears that with post-modernists/post-structuralists the Derridean concept of *difference* is found more attractive than differentiation. With the abandonment of any hope for a new totalization in the dialectical sense, they fall for such an untotalized network with the Derridean supplementary *differences* positing as the superior alternative to the Marxist notion of totality. But while doing so ultimately, they deny the subject and furnish a counter holistic concept. We learn from Alex Callinicos the critique of Derrida by Dews who argue that Derrida offers us "a philosophy of *difference* as the absolute"—an absolute which like Schelling's is unknowable by the "procedures characteristic of modern scientific rationality." Callinicos adds that the idealist Schelling believed that the absolute could be grasped intuitively; Derrida, by contrast, relies on the endless play of signifiers to provide us with an intimation of *difference*, though no more than that, because of the necessarily metaphysical nature of language.[110]

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110. Alex Callinicos, ibid, p. 76.

Under the extreme form of post-modernism, Baudrillard criticised Marx for being infected by the "*virus of bourgeois thought*." He announced the alternative of "*symbolic exchange"* against the Marxian analysis of capitalism. Baudrillard was critical of the working class and appears to accept the role of the new left, of hippies, etc. For him modern society was no longer dominated by production, but rather by the "*media, cybernetic models and steering systems, computers, information processing, entertainment and knowledge industries and so forth*." From all such features, Baudrillard found a veritable explosion of signs with the objective shifting from exploitation and profit to domination by the signs and the systems that produce them. Such post-modernist theoreticians preached that with the new epoch taking centre stage, the masses become increasingly passive, instead of increasingly rebellious as the Marxists believe. This Baudrillard, after his visit to the USA, came to the conclusion that there is no revolutionary hope, nor is there the possibility of reforming society.[111]

Foucault received an assignment to cover the Islamic Revolution in Iran from which power was captured by the forces of Khomeini. Foucault thoroughly endorsed this Iranian Islamism for its being completely different from the "*Western episteme*." Foucault supported it as because in Iran the so-called Islamic Revolution was free from the mod-

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111. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, Verso, London, 1989.

ern elements like "*class struggle or of social confrontations*" or "*the presence of a vanguard, class, party, or political ideology*"[112] Foucault's extreme bitterness against Enlightenment Reason leads him to court obscurantism of Iranian Islamic leaders. He posits the Iranian case against Reason in the following way.

> They don't have the same regime of truth as ours, which, it has to be said, is very special, even it has become almost universal... The Arabs of Maghreb have another, and in Iran it is largely modelled on a religion that has an exotic form and an esoteric content… So not only is saying one thing that means another not a condemnable ambiguity, it is on the contrary, a necessary and highly prized additional level of meaning. It is often the case that people say something that, at the factual level, isn't true, but refers to another, deeper meaning, which cannot be assimilated, in terms of precision and observation.[113]

While class, party, social confrontation, etc. are rejected as outcomes of Western Reason, Foucault glorifies not only Iranian religion but also the curious notion of Truth there. Thus Foucault obscures all the glaring line between truth and hideous false-

112. Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture—Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, Routledge, London, 1988, pp. 212-13.
113. Ibid, p. 223.

hood. Armed with such a view, the Foucaultian scheme cannot offer any justifiable or consistent explanation for imperialism or any genuine struggle to come out of the feudal socio-economic and cultural systems. The general post-modern view as expressed by Foucault to posit non-western un-reason against all Western Reason. This way of glorifying all religious rituals and practices as embodiment of tradition is to push the world back into the morass of orthodox tradition. Foucault's avoidance of presenting a narrative of colonialism, imperialism, political economy of capitalism actually blunts the cutting edge of his otherwise brilliant exposition of the birth of psychiatry or power-based knowledge. It should not be forgotten that Foucault visualised a massive project for "The Modern Age" and the "Western episteme." Foucault launched his crusade against liberation or to refer to the power, the immense power of modern imperialism in this period. Such silence is deafening.

Lyotard defined the modern in the following words:

> I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a meta-discourse… Making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectic of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth... This is the Enlight-

enment narrative, in which the hero of
knowledge works toward a good ethi-
co-political end—universal peace.[114]

Thus the post-modern condition what Lyotard
considered as modern is just an altogether rejection
of what he considered as "*modern*." It is a rejection
of Hegel and his view on "*the dialectics of spirit,*"
Kant's view on the emancipation of the rational or
working subject and Marxism for its dialectical-ma-
terialist position rejecting all unreason and the irra-
tionalities of the capitalist market. Lyotard like all
post-modernists do not like to speak of "human-
ity" or "mankind" which is supposed to be a part
of Enlightenment universalism leading towards a
totalising meta-narrative. When the notion of glo-
balization, global economy, etc. takes the centre
stage with the third world countries increasingly
falling under the deadly impact of globalization,
one wonders how could the post-modernists work
out a theory to face those problems.

Lyotard and other post-modernists not only
stand against the metanarrative of reason and
emancipation, they posit "*little narratives*" of ethnic
minorities, local communities, traditional beliefs,
etc. against the former. Lyotard's dangerously sec-
tarian and orthodox approach to culture is found
in the following sentences quoted by Aijaz Ahmad.

The consensus that permits such knowl-

114. Jean-Francois Lyotard*, The Post-modern Condition—A
Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota
Press, 1984, Introduction.

edge to be circumscribed and makes it possible to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't (the foreigner, the child) is what constitutes the culture of a people.

...Anthropological studies and literature that take rapidly developing societies as their object can attest to the survival of this type of knowledge within them, at least in some of their sectors. The very idea of development presupposes a horizon of non-development where, it is assumed, the various areas of competence remained enveloped in the unity of tradition and are not differentiated according to a separate qualifications subject to specific innovations, debates and inquiries… It is even compatible with the (apparently contrary) premise of the superiority of customary knowledge over the contemporary dispersion of competence.[115]

Post-modernism, while rejecting rationality, often tends to find in the pre-modern condition the sufficient answer to the solutions for the problems of modernity. Lyotard's approach to the understanding of "culture" is fraught with the dangerously orthodox proposition distinguishing "foreigners" and "natives." In cultural anthropology such a proposi-

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115. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition…,* ibid, p. 19.

tion was smuggled in the 1960s with the emphasis that "outsiders" cannot faithfully study a traditional society. In European philosophy also such conception of culture as a form of intuitive knowledge available to the insider dates back to at least Fichte and Herder. It was very common with German Romanticism and European racism. **When human potential "to act as rational and moral agents" is denounced by the post-modernists, it is natural for them to worship traditional illusory and overtly barbaric practices. In India during the hey-day of religious nationalism under the British Raj, orthodox Hindus were the dogmatic protagonists for the preservation of Indian tradition rooted in grotesque practices. The RSS activists must draw inspiration from Lyotard's propositions by rejecting non-Hindus any potential and scope to study Hindu practices to which they are the supposed foreigners. Lyotard's definition of culture as primordial belonging and intuitive knowledge actually leads him to draw the unscientific and irrational contrast between development with the modern elements emanated from Enlightenment and non-development based on "the superiority of customary knowledge." The positing of clear binary opposition between development and tradition virtually fits well with American modernization theories.**

Hindu revivalists bear a romantic longing for the spirit of the past as a dominant principle against "*individualistic, critical, rationalistic and materialis-*

tic trends of modern Western civilization. Hindu revivalism believes in a traditional, organic and associative outlook."[116] Like all the Hindu revivalists, the founders of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh which is now the BJP, announced the superiority of Hindu culture and was deeply convinced of the moral and rational efficacy of its values.[117]

Habermas found neo-conservatism in post-modernism. Actually speaking Habermas liked the early modernism of the Enlightenment period. On the other hand Lyotard wanted to remove all enlightenment based modernism. Habermas opposed post-modernism for its total condemnation of Reason and Enlightenment. He found that in the late 60s the youth were increasingly being overwhelmed by unreason, anarchism and frustration. He thought the crisis lay in the present economic system itself.

Post-structuralists, however, apparently differed themselves with modernism by emphasizing "text," not history or society. Derrida, Barthes et al. believed that there is nothing without language. Such faith in language is in actual sense a sort of revolving within modernism. The language and discourse are closely related in the view of the post structuralists.

It should be emphatically stated that both modernism and post-modernism are related to European or American society. Our country like most of the 3rd world countries has not yet witnessed "mod-

116. V. P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought*, Agra, 1980, pp. 372-373.
117. Ibid, p. 396.

ernism" in the western sense. A backward economic structure, steeped in tradition or religion, like ours has yet to get "modernised." So the debate is irrelevant in the mostly pre-modern system and structure in countries of the 3rd world.

If all categories are rejected, if certain things like measurement through the conceptual tools like theoretical mathematics are condemned, it will ultimately take us nowhere, in a chaotic condition. Foucault in his post-modernist writings rejected all sorts of power. Post-modernists also advocate total rejection of certain tools essential to find certain results like cause and effect and thus force us to go in for total chaos. Post-modernists/post-structuralists do not provide any solution, only raise questions and ultimately end up in absurdities. It takes us to a world without basis, without the need for change of the present system and in the end rejects common sense and the prospect of progress to a new society. They reject the power of a writer or the metaphysical basis of language but unwillingly or consciously develop power of their own to convince, behind a veil of neutrality and ultimately enter the cage of an anti-realist philosophy of language. Most important of all that the big guns of post-modernism and their trusted disciples keep themselves out of the pale of simple protest like against the US aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere. It is worth mentioning that academicians and intellectuals of the 20th century, both liberal unorthodox and Marxist in inclinations, made their voice heard around the world

on questions of war, imperialist aggression, fascism, etc. In contrast the post-modernist/post-structuralists leaders' voice is hardly heard when imperialism is unleashing its unbridled offensive against the people and even against some states asserting their rights of sovereignty.

CHAPTER **18**

POST-MODERNISM: A ROMANTIC PETTY-BOURGEOIS EXERCISE DUMPING RATIONALITY AND PRACTICE

Foucault presents us certain powerful arguments.

In *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish* Foucault furnishes us with fascinating examples that we are living in a disciplinary society. School, college, hospital, army, prison, factories are all modelled on disciplinary society. Man is in chains. And the basis of this chained condition is "*power-knowledge*." He believed:

> Power-knowledge springs from a political awareness of small things for the control and use of men for the purpose of administration.

That is, the discourse of power-knowledge dominates over man. As a corollary of this argument Foucault believed that even in the change of any established power the domination can not be eliminated. He believed that any system is an embodiment of domination. He reasoned; "*I think another system is to extend our participation in a system*." He accepted that against repression there will be resistance and it will be local, sporadic but that much. Foucault also went to the extent of declaring that "*Power is never manifested globally but always at local points, as micro power.*" He came in support of protest movements inside jails. With this notion of disciplinary soci-

ety Foucault analysed the French Revolution. He accepted that Enlightenment brought some measure of freedom but also burdened man with chains of domination. Through this Revolution peasants were made citizens from serfs and for this they had to pay a heavy price.

About Marxism, he said:

> At the deepest level of western knowledge, Marxism introduced no real discontinuity... Marxism had no intention of disturbing and above all, no power to modify even, one jot, since it rested entirely upon it.[118]

Against the Marxian view of unity, totality and universalism Foucault in his book *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Introduction) emphasized fragments, discontinuity and rupture. He himself stated that he is far away from Marxism and closer to Nietzsche. Echoing Foucault, Lyotard has written "*Let us wage war on totality… Let us activate difference*."

First, the concept of power can be analysed from two aspects. It is a fact that knowledge also gives birth to power. Examples are galore to justify it. If it is considered from the other way round one may conceive of a situation minus knowledge. Does it augur well for humankind? Is not knowledge essential? Besides that, when Foucault is vocal with his knowledge-based concept, does it not exert power on the listeners or readers?

118. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 260-262.

Secondly, Foucault's view on all the systems producing power is not to bring about any fundamental change. Structural functionalists and system analysts in the 1960s made it a point to drive this idea home that all systems are basically for the same function of delivering goods with requisite measures of system maintenance. **David Easton in his system theory clearly stressed this point reducing practically all the differences between a capitalist or socialist system to nothingness. If one is to accept Foucault's view then one cannot see the difference between a feudal or fascist capitalist system and a socialist system. As a corollary to Foucault's view one cannot expect any or try for any better system without the ruthless exploitation of the feudal lords or capitalists. Foucault and such post-modernists saw the socialist degeneration in the USSR and elsewhere. But while totally rejecting such new advanced systems they have not provided any remedy. In fact many of the post-modernists like Lyotard preferred the capitalist order. If post-modernists/post-structuralists are to be accepted then one is to reject the inherent and basic differences between a slave system and the feudal system, and between the capitalist system and the socialist system.**

Jürgen Habermas was the first theoretician who showed the relationship between post-modernism and neo-conservation and in his Adorno award speech criticised both of them. Habermas was in favour of modernism of the period of Enlighten-

ment; on the contrary Lyotard was against enlightenment-based modernism. Habermas identified post-modernism as "*post-modern conservation*" and then attacked it. He called Foucault and Derrida "Young conservative." Habermas looked with terror at the situation when the young generation was overwhelmed by unreason, anarchism and frustration. He also called post-modernism anti-modernism.

Marx and Engel's did not uncritically accept the Enlightenment. It should be remembered that despite great positive aspects of the Enlightenment, at the base of it lay the idealistic assumption that consciousness plays the decisive role in the development of society. It did not impart stress on the decisive role of the economic conditions of development and the objective laws of society. It addressed all classes of society especially those in power, preparing the advent of the capitalist system.

What Georg Lukacs called *"romantic anti-capitalism"* has now come up in the garb of post-modernism/post-structuralism in the challenge against entire Enlightenment. But what transpires as the main difficulties common to all the philosophers of this trend (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, *et al*) is their dangerous denial of any objectivity to discourse, their inability to base their resistance to power which they claim to articulate, their rejection of any coherence and also actual initiative to be assigned to the human subject. It is notable that on many an occasion those philosophers of the new trend are using

tools of modernism while rejecting it. In his critique of the Enlightenment and the rising capitalist system Marx of course examined bourgeois society, not as the actualization of reason, but as the latest version of the exploitation and imperialist expansion, distinguished chiefly by its technological dynamism and nurturing of the proletariat–the class capable of abolishing the exploitative society. While Marx and Engel's, working in the second half of the 19th century, used scientific reason against the bourgeoisie to decode the law of motion of capitalism in order to destroy it, Nietzsche, the philosopher father of Fascism and also present-day post-modernism/post-structuralism, a contemporary of those enemies of capitalism, preached the will to power as intrinsic to life itself and rejected non-exploitative society. This new idealism bears two prominent qualities, viz. puzzling and confusing the readers and lulling them in the deep tunnel with no escape route. This trend poses to be doing battles against holism, logocentric tradition, Enlightenment reason and univocality but what finally emerges, to follow Habermas, "*is that it merely inverts consciousness– philosophy by denying the subject, and thus ironically, is as holistic as the logocentric traditions it opposes...*"[119] This new trend is actually conservative with radical pronouncements. It can be equated with some striking features of the advanced capitalist societies

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119. Quoted in *Martin Jay, Habermas and Post-modernism* In Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, Volume II, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp. 241-242.

which are both libertarian and authoritarian, hedonistic and repressive, multiple and monolithic.

> The logic of the market place is one of pleasure and plurality, of the ephemeral and discontinuous of some great decentred network of desire of which individuals seem the mere fleeting effects... The political ambivalences of post-modernism match this contradiction exactly... a lot of post-modernism is politically oppositional but economically complicit...[120]

Post-modernists/post-structuralists declare war on Enlightenment and Reason as they built up the base of modernism, which later showed signs of degeneration. The question is how can one reject post-feudal developments? Instead of rejecting all the development in the fields of technology, science and such other fields a judicious, sober and rational view could have helped make a proper review of the developments related to the benefits of man and society and to decide on how to put a stop to the potentials of danger and degeneration. Take for example, the question of deforestation. Necessary deforestation in pockets could be balanced with systematic afforestation programmes in a planned economy (as was done in the communes in Mao's China)—but it is the capitalist's greed for profits that ravages the ecology. Some post-modernists are

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120. Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Post-modernism*, Blackwell Publishers, UK 1997, p. 132.

vocal supporters of environmental preservation. It is a right stand against reckless destruction of nature. Modernism overlooked environment, its flora and fauna. Man-nature relation was trampled by aggressive modernism based on capitalism.

It should be kept in mind words, like grass-roots, grass level, etc. were given priority by Mao. Post-modernists with their overwhelming priority on fragments, opposition to the concept of whole, etc. pose their views as a paradigmatic shift. Way back it was Marx who declared in 1844:

> The universality of man manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature as his **inorganic** body, (1) as a means of life and (2) as a matter, the object and the tool of his activity. Nature is man's **inorganic** body, that is to say, nature in so far as it is not human body. Man **lives** from nature, i.e. nature is his **body**, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and metal life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.[121]

Thus Marx, in his much-discussed question of alienation, brought forth the problem of estrangement of humanity from its own labouring activ-

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121. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, In Marx, *Early Writing*, Vintage, New York, 1974, p. 328.

ity along with from its active role in transforming nature, making man's estrangement from his own body from his spiritual, human essence. It is also an estrangement of man from himself and nature.

It is in order to state that post-modernist are not the pioneers in raising the question of ecological consciousness. Marx was not basically an environmentalist. Whenever he invoked Prometheus he did it mainly to project him as a symbol of revolution not as a symbol of technology. He was not a crude worshipper of "Prometheanism" or in other words a worshipper of the machine. Against mechanistic domination Marx did not share the views of the Romantics. He favoured rational development of science and technology for the all-round development of human creative potentials for the achievement of a realm of freedom maintaining ties with nature. It was Marx who could anticipate the destructive effects of machinery and large-scale industry. In his own words:

> All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is progress towards ruining the long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is

this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original source of all wealth—the soil and the worker.[122]

Marx's materialism is obviously not the "Baconian" domination of nature and economic development. It contained the assertion of ecological values, the assertion for balance man-nature relations. It is opposed to a spiritualistic, vitalistic view of the natural world tending to be the worshipper of nature. Marx's approach to environment was not spiritualistic naturalism or natural theology. Some Marxists also became staunch protagonists of unbridled development of productive forces without taking into account its fall-out on the man-nature relationship and the negative and destructive potentials associated with the monstrous growth of technology and science and also certain ideological and cultural decay. Mao opposed the theory of productive forces emphasizing politics in command in the context of his fight against the capitalist roaders. In India too the CPI and the CPI(M) on different occasions voiced in favour of pure industrialisation citing the examples of the first world coun-

122. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 637-38, quoted in John Bellamy Foster, *Marx and the Environment*, Monthly Review, July-August 1995, p. 109.

tries. It is in order to state that among the poets of the Romantic Age in England Wordsworth and some others gave a call to go back to Nature against the rapid progress of industrialisation. This love of Nature was also the result of bitter feelings emanating from the all-out attack against the feudal order during the French Revolution. The poetic fancy can permit a flight to the bosom of Nature disregarding down-to-earth reality but the irresistible power of the Industrial Revolution proceeded as a natural development opening up a new age tearing apart the past socio-economic relations. Some post-modernists echo the romanticists but one should take into account the present stage of industrialisation with potentials of devastation. The motive for super-profit, destruction of nature and production of lethal weapons etc. have been closely associated with the present moribund capitalist system and the extent to which those dangerous features have reached any conscious Marxist or even a democrat must think twice before extending support to any industrialisation or scientific experiments. We differ with post-modernists like Norman O. Brown who announced in the late 60s:

> Release all the chains of desire, instinct, discipline and the limits of all restraint. Be naked, strip yourself and go back to the habits of savage humans.[123]

123. Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, London, Sphere Books, 1970.

Daniel Bell called this attitude of Norman O. Brown "the post-modern mood," Brown is also against Reason and he believed that all knowledge is acquired through our sensory organs.

Even Freud, the leading figure of Psychology and a non-Marxist, studied instinct and placed his theory of the subconscious at a plane between the conscious and the unconscious. Freud in his unearthing of the subconscious, mainly tried to develop a bridge between art and neurosis, a sort of compromise between instinct and reality. In his discourse on civilization and its insatiety, Freud clearly stated that man always swings between the demand of instinct and the restriction of society. With the progress of civilization individuality becomes reduced, and that civilization puts man on certain fetters. Then Freud found some compatibility between the development of civilization and progress based on libido. He believed that at a certain stage a baby gets detached from the mother, which is necessary for the well-being of the baby. In Freud's opinion the real problem did not lie in the imposition of restrictions on inspirations. Not only that he had also to ultimately state critically that his psychoanalysis has confused many people. He was poignant to add that psychoanalysis was not any advocacy of unbridled instincts, rather its aim was to sound a warning to mend the deviations of the people in their lives.

The post-modernist mentors like Brown are for lifting all instinctive desires. While Freud, commonly known as the father of psychoanalysis

emphasizing instinctive factors, was for a restriction, the post-modernists prefer destruction of all restrictions on sex or instinctive acts.

Marx described his position in a unity of naturalism and humanism. Naturalism is that man is a part of nature, not created by some transcendental spiritual agency. But humanism is the view related to the fact that by a creative way of acting, in other words praxis, man both changes nature and creates himself. He assertively stated:

> If one wants to judge all human acts, movements, relations, etc. in accordance with the principle of utility one must first deal with human nature in general and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch.[124]

Marx gave new life to Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality. And what is more is that Marx specified the conditions under which human potentiality is crippled and wasted: the division of labour, private property, capital, state oppression and false ideological consciousness. Their abolition, what Freud never conceived of, is a necessary condition of universal emancipation.

The post-modern Brown was attracted to Rousseau's famous saying: man was born free and everywhere he is now in chains. With this Brown found that Freud is the measuring stick of our unsacred

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124. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Ch. 22.

madness and Nietzsche is the symbol of sacred madness and mad truth. Whereas Marx worked on a broader plane, post-modernists like Brown instead of visualising a new order based on equality and higher order of culture advocated anarchy and slavery to instinctive needs. Erich Fromm in his book *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology* had this to say:

> ...Marx's petit-bourgeois interpreters interpreted his theory as an economistic psychology. In reality, historical materialism is far from being a psychological theory; its psychological presupposition are few and may be briefly listed: men make their own history; needs motivate men's actions and feelings (hunger and love); these needs increase in the course of historical development, thereby spurring increased economic activity... Marx and Engels certainly stressed that the drive towards self-preservation took priority over all other needs, but they did not go into details about the quality of various drives and needs. However, they never maintained that the "acquisitive drive, the passion for acquisition as an aim in itself, was the only or essential need. To proclaim it a universal human drive would be naively to absolutise a psychic trait that has taken on uncommon force in capital-

ist society."[125]

In the same way if instinctive drive is given precedence over all economic and cultural activities of the people, as some post-modernists preach, man is posited as a slave to instincts!

To come once again to Foucault's view on power, the world has come across two powerful trends like anarchism and syndicalism in the past. Those post-modernists reject the principle of political authority as well. Anarchism also rejected it and imagined a society without authority. Its central negative thrust is directed against the core elements that make up the modern state, particularly its coercive machinery. The positive thrust of anarchism is directed towards the vindication of "natural society," i.e. a self-regulated society of individuals and freely-formed groups. Marx and Engels saw it as a petty bourgeois phenomenon. The attack was not against the actual state but an abstract state that nowhere exists. Moreover anarchism denied what was essential in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class: political action by an independent working-class party leading to conquest, not the immediate destruction of political power. For Engels:

> ...[A]bolition of the state makes sense only as the necessary result of the abolition of classes, with whose disappearance the need for organised power of one class

125. Ibid, pp. 167-168.

for the purpose of holding down the other class will automatically disappear.[126]

What Foucault meant by all-pervading power is an indisputable fact. But the abstract theory voicing against power is in reality a sort of valued criticism of powers without furnishing any remedial measures. Marxism rightly differentiates between the central and all-powerful power of the state and other centres of power. If Foucault's view that whoever occupies the state must wield power, is accepted to the letter then no effort should be made to destroy the existing power of the exploiting classes occupying the state. This virtually leaves the exploiting classes to retain the principal power centre. However, we, the Marxists have to find ways and means to check the communist party-led state turning into a bureaucratic power-wielding centre. On this score we still have to do a lot on the ideological and political front, particularly in post-revolutionary societies. Besides that, the peripheral multi-faceted sources of power should also be taken into account. But what Foucault presented as all-pervading power without any proper theorisation on tackling them is in reality the presentation of a fearsome picture of a monster with countless tentacles keeping uninterrupted surveillance on all of us who are reduced to helplessness in perpetuity. Foucault, however, was in favour of small-scale protests but those are not

126. Marx, Engels, Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndication*, Progress Publication, Moscow, 1972, p. 27.

supposed to culminate into a revolutionary struggle under a disciplined and well-ordered party.

To come to refute the view of Foucault on discontinuity, rupture, fragment in the historical process, Marxian dialectic examines the world in constant movement, change and development. The study of the general picture of the world's development is an important task of materialist dialectics. This movement proceeds not along a closed circuit, but along a spiral, each spire being deeper, richer and more diverse than the preceding one. Foucault did not find continuity but only ruptures and discontinuity. What Marxists stress is that the material world is not only a developing, but also a connected integral whole. All its objects and phenomena develop not in themselves, not in isolation, but in inseparable connection or unity with other objects, etc. are some of the important examples of this inter-connection and unity with nature. In history, the general trend in the world is to move from a primitive socio-economic system and relations to machine-based higher stage of economic and social system. There may be short-lived ruptures in this process. Marx cited the example of the attacks of barbarian tribes to overrun the Roman Empire bringing about a sort of break in the then advanced socio-economic structure (*Grundrisse*). Marxian dialectics also stresses the spiral in process of history, obviously not a pure straight line. In Foucault ruptures or discontinuity gets precedence over the general historical trend of progress. In practice such theory is

dangerous, since it reduces the historical process to only uncertain discontinuity. History, like so many things, is then like accidental events with no progress and the makers of history, in this post-modern view, must not have to work out any programme, must not have to have any theory and goal. Thus we are led to a world full of uncertainty, with no future of an advanced civilization. When such a theory is blended with the notion of never-possible-change in the power structure spread from top to bottom we are thrust into a world of frustration and futility. Foucault thus ends his ostensible tirade against the systemic power and oppression by projecting a state of permanent human bondage.

It is an irony of history that while the anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin *et al.* advocated some adventurous actions against the oppressive regimes, our present-day post-modernists/post-structuralists in general are too timid for any effective action against US imperialism and its international role of exploitation and barbarous attacks on all opponents of its interests.

As to the post-modernist concepts of the infinite (unlimited), totality, truth, etc. a few words may be added here. Marxism considers that the direct perception of things is the initial phase towards knowledge. Lenin defined sensation as a subjective image of the objective world. Idealist agnostics claim that the world consists of certain combinations of sensations of the subject, that there are as many worlds as there are people. This is false. In reality our sense

organs do not deceive us. In Mao's view sensory or perceptual knowledge takes a dialectical leap in the brains to reach the level of conceptual knowledge. Logical cognition or the conceptual knowledge is a higher state of knowledge resulting from generalised activities of man's reason, the painstaking process of a vast mass of data furnished by sensory knowledge. Concepts also reflect the changing world, the constantly developing practice, and hence they themselves must be flexible and mobile. Other forms of thought-judgement and conclusions are formed on the basis of concepts. It is in order to mention it that while the supporters of empiricism underestimate the role of abstract thought or knowledge, accepting only sense-impressions, the supporters of rationalism do not believe in the sense-organs and consider reason or abstract thought the sole source of true knowledge. Marxism places three interconnected basis of knowledge—sensory, human practice in constituting social life and concept.

Dialectical materialism understands truth as that knowledge of an object, which correctly reflects that object, i.e., corresponds to it. With this dialectical materialism solves another important problem of knowledge, i.e. how man cognizes objective truth—at once completely, unconditionally, absolutely or only approximately, relatively. Absolute truth is objective truth in its entirety, an absolutely exact reflection of reality. In principle Marxism holds that nothing is unknowable but simultaneously it accepts it that there are limitations to the cognitive

abilities of man's reason. His knowledge is limited by the corresponding historical conditions, the level of development of production, science and experimental techniques. In this sense his knowledge is limited. Relative truth is the incomplete correspondence of knowledge to reality. And thus it is closer to the cognition of absolute truth, to knowing its new elements, links and sides. Relative truth is, in a sense, containing grains of absolute truth. Man's knowledge is relative and also absolute; relative because it is not exhaustive and can be endlessly developed and deepened, revealing new sides of reality; absolute, because it contains elements of eternal, absolutely exact knowledge. In addition to it Marxism holds that truth is always concrete, not abstract. Even for one and the same process truth cannot be eternal or fixed once and for all. This process itself develops, the conditions in which it takes place change and naturally the truth reflecting it also undergoes change. What is true in a certain condition may be untrue in a changed condition.

Thus Marxism is just the reverse of the view of Nietzsche and other post-modern theoreticians who reject objective truth or any hope of progress. Human civilization itself negates such desperately pessimist views while conceding the fact of temporary retardation, retreat, crisis and all the stumbling blocks in history. Marxists reject the absolutising notion of the post-modernists/post-structuralists that truth is constituted by language or that truth is always formed by power.

Related to the question of knowledge the Marxian concept of totality stands radically against the post-modernist view of fragments as enunciated by Foucault. Marxism stressed dynamic totality. It is the concrete unity of interacting contradictions. The systemic relativity of all totality both upwards and downwards, *i.e.* all totality is made up of totalities subordinated to it and vice versa Secondly, all totality is changing in the concrete historical period. Marx took the concept of totality as a dialectical method from Hegel. In Lenin's words:

> The totality of all sides of the phenomenon, of reality and their (reciprocal) relations—that is what truth is composed...[127]

Thus social totality in Marxist theory is a structured and historically determined complex. It exists in and through those manifold meditations and transitions through which its specific parts of complexes—i.e., the partial totalities—are linked to each other in a dynamic world. The fragmented approach of the post-modernists cannot provide us with concrete knowledge. It cannot give a many-sided view of totality basing on categories and practice. Such rejection of totality by post-modernists/post-structuralists with total negation of theory and the concept of truth can only furnish a partial view. Jean Paul Sartre criticised the concept of totality as something problematic. However his concern was

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127. Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic*, Progress Publishers, 1961, p. 196.

"*totalisation*" not "totality" as such. Sartre found totalisation, *i.e.* a multiplicity which totalises itself to totalise the practical field from a certain perspective, and its common action, through each organic praxis, is revealed to every common individual as a developing objectification.[128] In such a view the whole, as a developing totalisation, exists in everyone in the form of a unity of the "*interiorised multiplicity and nowhere else*."

Richard Harland in his book *Superstructuralism* marks a distinction between structuralism and superstructuralism (in other words post-structuralist, post-modernism). Harland states that the former in general, is concerned to know the (human) world—to uncover it through detailed observational analysis and to map it out under extended explicatory grids.

> Their stance is still the traditional scientific stance of objectivity, their goal the traditional scientific goal of Truth.[129]

About the later, *i.e. Superstructuralism*, Harland writes:

> ...[T]hese groups are fractious in the extreme, and make the most of their differences. Nonetheless, they do share a characteristic new philosophical posi-

128. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, London, New Left, 1960, p. 492.
129. Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism*, Methuen, London, 1987, p. 2.

tion—and this characteristic new philo-
sophical position is not only incompati-
ble with the concept of structure but also
quite radically anti-scientific. In effect, the
post-structuralists bend the philosophical
implications of the Superstructuralists
way of thinking about superstructures
back round against the traditional stance
of Objectivity and the traditional goal of
truth. And, with the destruction of objec-
tivity and Truth, scientific knowledge
becomes less valuable than literary and
political activity; and detailed observa-
tional analysis and extended explicatory
grids are discarded in favour of instanta-
neous lighting-flashes of paradoxical illu-
mination.[130]

Let us consider the critique of Marxism by the
front ranking post-modernist Baudrillard. As for
natural labour power, he considers work no more
important than non-functional play and ritual in
the primitive conditions. He contradicted Marx's
view on alienation. In Marxian sense it is an action
through which (or a state in which) a person, a
group, an institution, or a society becomes (or
remains) alien **(1)** to the results or products of its
own activity (and to the activity itself), and/or **(2)**
to the nature in which it lives, and/or **(3)** to other
human beings, and—in addition and through any

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130. Ibid, p. 3.

or all of (1) to (3)—also **(4)** to itself (to its own historically created human possibilities). Baudrillard thinks that a man is alienated when he starts to see himself in terms of labour-power in the first place. He criticises Marx for placing the needs against the interest of capital, as being under the spell of the capitalist consumption ethic. So Baudrillard does not consider the Marxian view as a radical one. Secondly, he contradicted Marx's concept on use-value and exchange-value. Marx's view was that exchange-value ought to correspond with use-value. Baudrillard stated that exchange-value is autonomous. In the Marxist conception, the apparent fairness and balance in exchange relations between man and man no longer corresponds to a real fairness and balance on the level of use-value; the system of equivalences on the level of exchange value merely obscures and excuses the real exploitation of one class by another. But Marx still thinks that exchange-value ought to correspond to use-value, rejecting the autonomy of exchange value. Baudrillard not only accepts autonomy of exchange-value, what he objects is exchange value *per se,* exchange value as it operates in the capitalist economics, exchange value as a system of equivalences. With this view Baudrillard moves further and poses things in his post-structuralist way. He sees the capitalist tyranny as not mere accumulation of material benefits by one class at the expense of another, he posits the tyranny at the proper functioning of social exchange. And then referring everything to natural needs, natural labour-power

and natural use-value Baudrillard thinks, the tyranny manages to make itself seem natural. He thus inverts the notion that exchange-value, obscures and excuses a real exploitation on the level of use-value, and claims that, on the contrary, use-value serves as "a referential rationale (raison) a concept, an alibi" for a real tyranny on the level of exchange-value. In a post-modernists/post-structuralists fashion Baudrillard virtually obscures the basis of capitalist exploitation at the socio-economic level based on ownership of means of production conditioning the extraction of labour power of the class forced to sell labour power. Instead of this relationship, Baudrillard places the whole mechanism of exploitation, which, he asserts, is to be found in "*a new revolution that has occurred in the capitalist world...*" And this is the measuring, coding, regulating system, which applies to every aspect of human exchange-relation. The whole operationalization of all exchanges lies under the law of the code. Thus he wants to have us believe that what Marx never contemplated and Marxists fail to comprehend is that the present day capitalist exploitation is to be found not in basically and fundamentally the production relation but in "*a structure of control and of power much more stable and more totalitarian than that of exploitation*." He assertively states that we are now faced with "*the symbolic destruction of all social relations not so much by the ownership of the means of production but by the*

control of the code."[131]

Thus, like other post-modernists Baudrillard, basing himself on semiotics, finds alternative to the present capitalist system not in some pre-signifying "*nature"* but in a further intensification of signifying itself. In Harland's explanation if we can no longer simply recover a state of social flow and giving as in symbolic exchange of the tribes, then we must take the deliberately perverse route of intensifying our present day of anti-social inertia and passive receptivity. And since consumerism is the very essence of our anti-social inertia and passive receptivity, we must become more purely consumers than before. For Baudrillard "*the masses,"* as created by modern mass-society, are truly like a physical dead weight, absorbing everything and responding to nothing. By taking the signs, bombarded by mass-media, literally, as nothing more than signs, "*the masses,"* according to Baudrillard, are driving the regime of "*the sign"* towards its own logical self-destruction.

Thus the role of "masses" is entirely negative. Richard Harland observes:

> Unlike Marxist proletariat, Baudrillard's masses carry no seed from which a more positive state of society might spring, after the self-destruction of our present state...

For some structuralists to post-structuralists/ post-modernists the real problem is that a most

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131. Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1975, p. 122.

all-pervading role of ideology, sign and such super structural elements which they give are given a permanently privileged position over the socio-economic base of a society. Althusser, the structuralist Marxist, also echoed that in the present stage of capitalism it is bourgeois ideological influence which is making overt repression unnecessary as was seen during Marx's time with the obvious presence of a repressive apparatus of the police, army, prisons, courts, etc.[132]

Foucault over stresses the less visible network of coercion and instead of the legal instruments he basically points to the all-pervading power without specific centre(s). Baudrillard too takes us to the immense power of signs. In all such instances while the function of multifaceted aspects of signs controlling and benumbing and also mesmerising the common people are poignantly unfolded, the fundamental question of all direct exploitation, oppression and control through the economic basis remaining as the principal source along with all the visible apparatus of repression and control is theoretically pushed to the level of unimportance or virtually of least importance. There is no programme for the post-modernists/post-structuralists to do battle against the base for an alternative system, nor do they stand as the real enemy of modern capitalism. With the flashes of puzzling arguments lacking in the spirit of a rebel in a real life situation post-mod-

132. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, pp. 180-181.

ernism/post-structuralism will remain in history as half-hearted protesters with profound intellect sans the cutting teeth. They concentrate on cutting off the branches of a tree, and it is undoubtedly necessary, but the root is left unattacked.

In his whole thesis on power, Foucault sees state repression but never tries to single it out as the principal target. Rather he is projecting a vast net-work like a will-o-wisp, which wields power but it is never possible to hit it or we can never be free from it. In this intellectual exercise while subtle sources of power, particularly of the present capitalist system, is perfectly presented, Foucault fights shy of the fundamental generators of power or power centres like the state.

However, one does not disagree when Foucault attacks the view that power exclusively springs from economic factors. The vitally important questions like gender, race, caste, etc. require to be studied considering other non-economic factors as well. It is a fact that some Marxists in India and other countries had and still have a perpetual penchant for reducing all those problems to solely economic problems. It is vulgar Marxism. The power of Marxism lies in the fact that it contains a corrective mechanism to check wrong tendencies. It might be in order to once again refer to Engel's letter to C. Schmidt on October 27, 1980 combating a reductionist interpretation of the base-superstructure image by emphasising the "ultimate supremacy" of, or "determination in the last instance" by the economy which "nevertheless oper-

ates within the terms laid down by the particular sphere itself." He thus moves away from the idea of a causality whereby one level, the economy, is supposed to be the cause and the other levels, the superstructure its effects. Thus the ultimate determining factor does not exclude determination by the superstructures, which, as secondary causes, can produce effects and "react" upon the base.

This has been stated above to make it clear that Marxism does not exclude the important role of the factors other than economic in certain circumstances and conditions. And here it should be added that neither Foucault nor Derrida could totally reject Marxism. Foucault had this to comment in an interview entitled *Prison Talk*:

> It is impossible at the present time to write history without using a whole range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx's thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx. One might even wonder what differences there could ultimately be between being a historian and being a Marxist.

Even while rejecting certain fundamentals Derrida assertively stated in his book *Specters of Marx*:

> ...[N]ow, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical idea or the questing stance (a consistent deconstruction must

insist on them even as it also learns that this is not the last or first world). It is even more a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any messianism. Now, this gesture of fidelity to a certain spirit of Marxism is a responsibility, once again, would here be that of an heir. Whether they wish it or know it or not, all men and women, all over the earth, are today to a certain extent heirs of Marx and Marxism...[133]

Thus said two stalwarts of post-modernists/post-structuralists with all the reservations on certain fundamental questions of Marxism. However, Marxism does not require accolades from intellectuals indulging in some sort of benumbing exercise, which cannot augur well for the people mired in poverty and exploitation or the people facing imperialist onslaughts.

Then what is the programme of post-modernists? Foucault in his general outline of the *Methodological Course* to study power had made it clear:

...[W]e must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and state institutions, and instead base our analysis of

133. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Routledge, New York and London, 1994.

power on the study of the technique and tactics of domination.

It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.[134]

Foucault's programme is limited to only partial or local resistance to power. His evasive attitude towards the vast power of the modern state reduces his scheme to some form of libertarianism without the cutting edge of the revolutionary spirit with a clear aim and objective.

Coming once again to the philosophical question of reason and knowledge, it is necessary to assert that Marxism is a superior philosophical system and it critically drew heavily on the rational outlook of the Enlightenment period. Post-modernism attacks at the root of science and reason. They altogether reject the Kantian concept of reason and knowledge. For Marx, Engels and Lenin, Kant's theory of knowledge was defective on three courts. First, it was held to be ahistorical in its account of the apriori contribution made by the mind in the constitution of knowledge. Secondly, whereas Kantianism locates the a priori conditions of objective knowledge in faculties of the mind, Marxism characteris-

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134. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ibid, p. 133.

tically locates them in indispensable human social practices, which have bodily and mental aspects. Finally, Engels and Lenin argued that the boundary between the world of knowable "phenomena" and the unknowable "*things-in-themselves"* was not, as Kantianism required, fixed and absolute but historically positive. The potential knowability of the world, independent of and prior to the human subject, was seen as essential to the materialist worldview of Marxism. Derridean Deconstruction moves towards endless substitution of presence but presence can never be reached. His *difference* ultimately involves the metaphysics of presence. Thus Derrida sets *difference* in the place unknowable. A return to Kantian "*things-in-themselves!"*

When post-modern/post-structural concepts are employed in affirmative action or norms they yield an attitude of skepticism and nihilism within which every kind of coherent and meaningful enquiry becomes suspect. While reading a text, post-modernism/post-structuralism first postulates ambiguity, incoherence and not-determination as the attributes of texts, and then actively pursues the ideal of ambiguity, in coherence and analysis. Such fondness for a play of words leads to a sort of jugglery through the "*denial of the metaphysics of presence and foundationalism of every kind."* With their dismissal of totality, they celebrate difference and heterogeneity. Though the Foucaultian concept of the insep- arabletic between power and knowledge or Der- ridean ultimately *difference* is no less a concept of

totality. They also reject progress and emancipation in history. The fragmentation of the social world is, within this perspective, compounded by the post-modern/post-structural denial of coherence in life and social structure precluding the possibility of offering explanations. With their notion of "dislocations" structural regularities and identities are issues that remain unexamined. Similarly, the narrative of dislocations remains an enigma. They even rule out the possibility of explanations, however incomplete, partial or limited they might be. With their rejection of cause and effect they exclude any predictability in any field. While the critics of historical determinism accepted at least the possibility of post-hoc explanations. As for example, we can retrospectively explain why a bullet launched at a particular point landed where it did. This means we can explain the trajectory by methodologically (and temporarily) closing off what in reality is an "open" system, undetermined and subject to the play of multiples variables. Post-modernists contradict both pre and post-hoc explanations, in the existence of a coherent structure and the supposed attempt by the analyst "to introduce closure." Some critiques find gross weakness in over-emphasising open-endedness in their writings. It is argued that human intentions may not always be realized and other individuals may read the situation differently: but individual actions can be conceived and executed only by giving a determinate meaning to a situation. The critiques justifiably argue that a certain degree of closure is integral to

our being and social life; it is neither a myth nor a limiting aspiration. The notion of multivocity or multiple voices has two correlatives: difference and non-determination. What is actually found is that many post-modernists/post-structuralists translate non-determination to suggest the incoherent and ambiguous nature of the text. In their view social structure like history or life are unstable, incoherent and ambiguous. Such nihilist conception of the text fragment the actual social world and reduce it to a myth. Epistemologically speaking, the destructive denial of univocity at any moment including the claim that the words or utterances can have a univocal meaning in a giving context opens the floodgates of relativism. This in reality even abandons partial explanation of social phenomena. If such view is accepted, pessimism will rule supreme. No social revolutionary, no scientist, no revolutionary party, no theory and no practice can take off since at the very beginning the supposed notion of incoherence and faulty basis shall doom the whole endeavour.

Conclusion

When post-modernists question the very possibility of knowledge or knowing the truth it rather sounds like unknowable "*things-in-themselves,*" an agnostic world-view. It is relevant here to quote a brilliant passage from Lenin on the theory of knowledge. It runs thus:

> First, if we are to have a true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all its facets, its connections and "mediacies." That is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely, but the rule of comprehensiveness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity. Secondly, dialectical logic requires that an object should be taken in development, in change, in "self-movement"… Thirdly, a full "definition" of an object must include the whole of human experience, both as a criterion of truth and a practical indication of its connection with human wants. Fourthly, dialectical logic holds that "truth is always concrete, never abstract."[135]

The above is self-explanatory and stands on the opposite pole of the post-modernist/post-structuralist position on acquiring knowledge and attain-

135. V. I. Lenin, *Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin*, In *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, 1979, p. 94; Quoted in Alexandra Getmanova, *Logic*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1989, p. 348

ment of truth.

However, this does not mean the Foucaultian reference to the subtle net-work of power should not guide us to conduct research and take lessons from our reality. On some aspects the post-modernist critique of the varied ills encountered as a result of capitalism could widen our horizon of knowledge. But what basically makes us stand apart from such approach is its war against reason and science along with the conservative aspects devoid of any programme for the destruction of the capitalist system itself. Simultaneously we have to upgrade our theoretical framework to cope with the monstrous mechanism of present capitalism. Marx wrote Capital to destroy capitalism. In the hovering atmosphere of pessimism generated by the degeneration in the erstwhile Soviet Union and Mao's China it is incumbent on the Marxists to rise to the occasion in order to develop socialist thought to a higher stage only by rectifying the past mistakes. And here lies the necessity of constant dialogue with certain post-modernist view-points and other critical theories in all fields of knowledge in order to enrich our knowledge and judgement, and to establish the invincibility of Marxism in a world of chaos.

So to sum up:

Post-modernism is a trend of thought opposed to modernism (i.e. ideas emanating in the post-feudal era) and is therefore not only opposed to Marxism, but the entire leaps in thinking and values that came with the birth of capitalism—i.e. the Enlight-

enment, the Renaissance, Reason and even science.

Post-modernism, though it can trace its roots to over a century back, in its present garb, it draws extensively from the philosophies of Nietzsche, the philosophical farther-figure of Hitler's fascism.

Post-modernism got a major boost due to the intellectual vacuum resulting from the temporary setback to communism, resulting from the reversals in the Soviet Union and China, and a retreat of the national liberation movements that witnessed an upsurge in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the resulting atmosphere of pessimism, post-modernism found thousands of takers even from the ranks of the Marxists, demoralised by the setbacks.

There is no doubt that the post-modernists address the ills of society thrown up by the capitalist/imperialist system, whether in the field of science, medicine, architecture, bureaucratisation and power polity, oppression and discrimination, etc., but their opposition does not come with any solutions. Though the Chinese experience, particularly that of the Cultural Revolution, did give many answers to these questions, it was short-lived and the reversal there, soon after, reduced the impact of that experience.

Post-modernism has, in fact, flourished in this period of "globalisation." The setbacks in the above-said movements facilitated, in a big way, the offensive, on a world-scale, of imperialist capital, which has come to be called "globalisation." And with "globalisation" and the retreat of the State from all

welfare measures, together with the vacuum created by the retreat of communism, the imperialists pushed and funded lakhs of NGOs throughout the world, and particularly in the backward countries, where levels of poverty became even more extreme. What existed earlier in pockets was now made an overwhelming phenomenon. And today, it is these NGOs that are one of the major vehicles of post-modernist ideas and views.

In India too, post-modernism has proliferated among a section of dissident intellectuals, disillusioned "Marxists" and more particularly amongst the thousands and thousands of NGOs. Though the bulk of them may not subscribe to post-modernist philosophy openly (and may not even know its contents), they generally reflect that type of thinking. This is manifested in a mode of thinking that has a common thread, and, as such, ends in being anti-people. One strong factor in their approach is their attitude to power. First, as they have the approach that all power is bad they oppose any change in the existing order, on the grounds that the new power will be as bad. This, de facto, amounts to support to the present capitalist/imperialist system. Also, on the same grounds they are averse to organisation and organised dissent as that too will result in alternative power centres; so continuous "discourse," like at the WSF, is more their focus rather than coming to conclusions and evolving organised plans of action. Generally, all these NGOs also take a negative attitude towards revolutionary organisations, and when

they do associate they have the approach to subvert them—philosophically all these are linked to their approach to power. Second, their primary focus is at a micro level, they have no macro focus, also a part of the post-modernist approach. Third, their anti-modernist, anti-reason approach makes them turn back to tradition and the glorification of backward feudal thinking—this can result in them even becoming apologists of reactionary views like Hindutva. Fourthly, their emphasis on compartmentalised ethnicity and opposition to class unity results in them promoting exclusiveness of the Dalit, women, tribal, etc. questions, resulting in the fragmentation of the unity of all the oppressed. Such then is the negative role that post-modernism is playing at the ground level within the Indian scenario.

The post-modernist critique of the ills of this system has its basis in the horrendous impact of the present crisis ridden system that is affecting every sphere of human activity. The acute impoverisation of the masses; the intense alienation faced by the people; the degrading status of the more marginalized sections; the vulgarisation of the utilisation of science, as seen in the medical, armament and other spheres; the rapacious destruction of the environment; the blatant mafia-style operations of the power brokers and big business; and the fascist terror and imperialist wars—all have resulted in a groundswell of opposition to this system. But some ideological basis is necessary to anchor such sentiments. With the weakening of the communist

movement, post-modernism has sought to fill the vacuum, and was used primarily as a weapon against Marxism. What is required is a re-assertion of science, reason and a creative application of Marxism to the ill of this system.

This can only be achieved by making Marxism a living social science to be creatively used as an ideological tool with which to understand present phenomena, and devise a way out of the morass. To do so, one has to rescue Marxism from the grip of the revisionists, dogmatists, empiricists and all those who vulgarise its scientific, class and revolutionary essence. Only then will Marxism be able to effectively counter post-modernism and illumine a path for the suffering masses to a new bright future.

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