



Post-modernism in Contemporary Political Theory

Mr. Laxmi Kanta Ghosh

SET Qualified, Department of political science, State Aided College Teacher, Category-1, Raja Rammohun Roy Mahavidyalaya

Date of Submission: 13-08-2024

Date of Acceptance: 27-08-2024

Abstract:- Post-modernism approach is a most significant and relevant in the political theory. Post-modernism is a agitation against of modernism. It created a new horizon to the study of political theory in political science. It jolted the main pillar of modernism. It accepts diversity, human value and breaks the all boundary of human development. So, postmodernism as a political theory has a great contribution to the social science.

Keywords:- Post-modernism, Modernism, Truth, Knowledge, Power.

I. Introduction:-

Post-modernism is considered as a sharp reaction against the predominance of modernism . Modernism was the product of the industrial era when the traditional method of explanation and expression got replaced by 'reason' and 'science'. The fundamental attributes of reason and science are to formulate grand narratives and theories. Post-modernism emerged as a radical alternative to modernity. It argues that modernism is too centralized and monolithic in nature and so it suppresses the minor identities and voices. It rejects the notion of a single meaning of truth. It challenges the various established and settled assumptions pertaining to society, culture and the nature of knowledge. It corroded the fundamental foundations of epistemology in general and the practices of social sciences in particular . It advocates multiplicity of narratives and refutes the possibility of meta –narratives. Although postmodernism is a major trend theory of knowledge, there is little consensus on its origin . The term was first used in an article published in 1914 in "The Hibbert Journal" by J.M. Thompson. The article described the transformation in attitude and beliefs within the Christian society of that time. Later, the concept of post-modernism gained currency in architecture and literacy criticism as a tool to describe and explain the the dissatisfaction with modern architecture and deconstruct the literary texts to demystify the hidden power-

knowledge relationship. Since the 19th century, it has been embraced by all disciplines such as architecture, literature, art, philosophy, ethics, political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, penology etc. with different emphases within each of these disciplines. Post-modernism is arguably considered a bucket of ambiguity with its distrust towards everything and lacking of any clear cut direction .This fundamental nature of post-modernism makes it difficult to provide one all-embracing definition as it often seeks to grasp what escapes the processes of simple definitions and celebrates what resists or disrupts them . Even there is disagreement among postmodernists on whether post modernity is continuous with modernity or represents a radical break with it ; or are they engaged in a long –running relationship with one another with post-modernity continually pointing out the limitation of modernity .

Methodology:- This paper is followed by the qualitative research methodology and used by secondary data like books, articles etc.

Definition of post-modernism:- Post-modernism is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the ideas of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narrative or ultimate grounds of explanation . Against these enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, undergrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunited cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of skepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the 'givenness' of natures and the coherence of identities.

The term postmodernism was used for the first time by Lyotard in his book 'THE POSTMODERN CONDITION'. He defines postmodernism as Incredulity towards meta narratives. It means disbelief in 'any grand theory'.



Exponents of post-modernism:- Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Francois Lyotard, Richard Rorty, Fredric Jameson, Ernest Laclou and Chantal Mouffe are important thinkers of the postmodernism .

Principal Tenets of Post-modernism:- The salient features of the postmodernism perspective may be enumerated as under;

1. It rejects the view that there may be absolute or final versions of beauty , truth and morality. Discourses on the theme of 'reality' must go on endlessly.
2. Modernity went beyond providence of the Middle Ages and appreciated the course of humanism so as to pave the way of human progress on rational or course of humanism so as to pave the way of human progress on rational or scientific grounds. Post-modernity moves from progressivism to nihilism.
3. It signifies 'deconstruction' which implies the task of raising questions about the 'text' which constitute cultural life exposing its complication and contradictions.
4. It is anti-Marxism. It refutes the laws of Marx which are lauded by the Marxists as objective and scientific. Post-modernism denounce the Marxian propositions as 'fallen meta-narratives in the present phase of hyper-reality'.
5. It is a reaction against modernity of course, but it imbibes within itself the traits of modernity. Thus, it may be treated as the extension and exhaustion but not the demise of modernity. It certainly inflates certain features of modernity and,

by contrast, shrinks others into insignificance so as to create new social configurations.

6. It mixes social and economic with the cultural. Initially its queries covered the realms of art and architecture, but in course of time, they covered all the dimensions of human life and activity. Post-modern queries embrace ideals, values, symbols, tastes and styles of the people.

7. Post-modernity is linked to post-industrialism. The development of society no longer is dependent upon manufacturing industry, it is more reliant upon knowledge, information and communication.

8. The philosophy of post-modernism supports globalization. Like globalization , post-modernism feels that any form of borders be it social, political, economic are hindrance in development of human society and its communication within it, Post-modernists believe in breaking down all sorts of walls that restrict humans in any way. They promote a free world.

9. Post-modernism says No one way of life is correct. Everyone has equal rights to live the way one wants to, without any restriction.

10. Post-modernists believe that there is no absolute truth, everything is relative and in accordance to how one wants to interpret the reality. Truth is ever changing and has no one explanation. There are multiple truth and not one ultimate truth.

11. Post-modernists do not get stuck in the categories of 'right' and 'wrong', as they are against the notion of absolute truth in post-modernism.

Comparison between modernism and post-modernism:-

Modernism	Post-modernism
They believe that objectivity is needed and objective knowledge is possible.	Objectivity is neither possible nor desirable.
Modernism believes that there is a structure in the universe.	Post-modernism suggest that there that there are no structures/chaos.
Believes in hierarchy of science .	No hierarchy.
Centralization, Authority and Control.	Localization, Freedom and Anarchy.
Observation is a source of knowledge.	Experience is a source of knowledge and experiences of people may vary.
Modernity believes in homogenization.	Post-modernism recognizes diversity.



Modernity is foundationalist.	Anti-foundationalism.
Universalist.	It is particularistic.
Believes in meta-narratives	Suggests to hear multiple narratives.

Foundation of Post-modernism:- Post-modernism in the western culture based on a set of plug-intellectual foundation, intellectual artistic, aesthetic and moral. So, it could be identified in the following principal and elements:

1. **Criticism comprehensive explanatory theories:** Post-modernism has sought to destroy the moral an authority of the major intellectual formats, which usually take the form of ideologies.

2. **Dual criticism of the analysis in the humanities:** In the Western project of Modernism, there meet between the two components of “self and subject”, while Postmodernism calls for the cancellation of self-modernism.

3. **A new vision to concepts of history, Time and Place:** Postmodern formed special new ideas about the history, time and place, regarding history as an independent discipline, or as an entry point for many of the social science, humanities, and applied science. The postmodern aims to minimize the importance of history, and does not see his role as being only a witness always testifies whoever is stronger.

4. **The truth is relative and not absolute:** The ideas of Post- modernism are characterized by denying everything that was prevalent on the Modernism stage and considers that the pursuit of the ultimate truth is the largest human error committed in the course of scientific and practical goal, and the basic idea of Post-modernism is that it’s impossible to reach the truth.

5. **Rejected the Idea of Representation:** Post-modernism rejects all representation operations in any form of representation . In the sense that there is a group of individuals representing the rest of the people in parliament. The fundamental problem is the lack of understanding and inability to represent the other, because of the differences in the political discourse of each party and the different meaning of terms between cultures and even among members of the same culture, hampering the process of representation .

Post modernism and Post Structuralism: Post-modernism and post-structuralism have a number of similarities.

1. Post-modernism is a theory of society, culture and history whereas Post-structuralism is a theory of knowledge and language.

2. Post-modernism prefers decentered knowledge whereas Post-structuralism includes anti-foundationalism i.e. refutation of the modern search for rational grounds for knowledge and morality; emphasis on construction of meaning and rhetoric in texts; and relation between knowledge and power.

3. Post- modernism and post-structuralism , both are mistrustful about monolithic traditions in social sciences.

4. Both reject the project of universal social science.

Therefore, it can be stated that post-structuralism is a movement in social and political theory within the realm of post-modernism with a wider coverage of cultural and social aspects.

Post-modernism and Globalization: The classical, social and political theory lays a greater emphasis on nation states. Under the umbrella of globalization, the states and societies have undergone fundamental changes. Postmodernism argues that nation states are losing importance under globalization as world is becoming interdependent. Thetechnological and electronic revolution has created heterogeneity, pluralization, individualization, differentiation and fragmentation over homogenization of earlier times. The postmodern world is one where technology within the confines of consumerist capitalism is creating diversity and pluralization. Immanuel

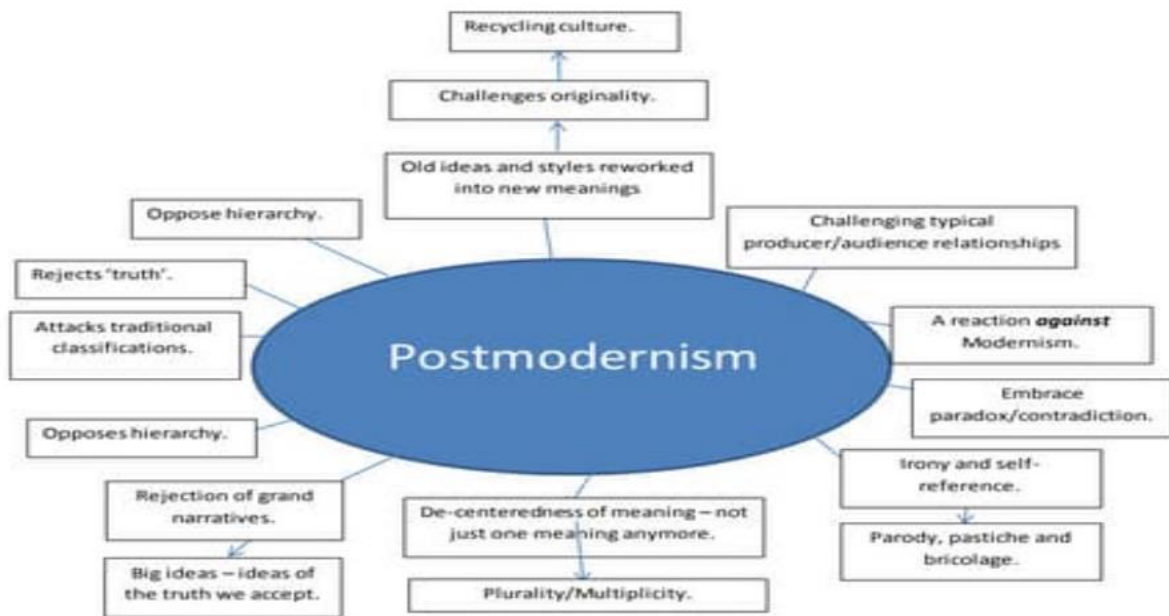
Wallerstein argues that the history of the world capitalist system has been trending towards cultural heterogeneity rather than cultural homogenization. Therefore,the processes of fragmentation of the state in the world system along with cultural differentiation are taking place simultaneously.

The Postmodern Condition, Replacing Grand with the Local: Jean Francisois Lyotard in 1979, wrote an important book “ The Post Modern Condition : A Report on Knowledge” this book introduced the term ‘post modern’ which was previously discussed and used only by the art critics. Lyotard discussed the notion of knowledge



in an postmodern world. He discussed what type of knowledge and what meaning of knowledge exists in a postmodern set up. The notion of knowledge in post modern condition meant to terminate the 'grand' theories and the metanarratives that were prevalent in the modern condition. Post modernism outrightly rejected the use of Metanarratives which included narrative historical accounts , meanings

derived out of experience or one's knowledge . Lyotard proposed that Post Modernism should break the shackles of metanarratives and grand universal theories and should start understanding the local narratives, which are specific and nonuniversal in nature and deal with single events. Local narratives would result in understanding varied forms of human experiences.



Critique of Post-modernism: Critics have pointed out that postmodernism has become a grand-narrative in itself and it intensifies problems of personal and social disintegration and despair. Naom Chomsky has even argued that postmodernism is meaningless as it has nothing to add to empirical and analytical knowledge. Pauline Rosenau has highlighted the fact that while postmodernism stresses the irrational, instruments of reason are freely employed to advance its perspective. He further argues that postmodernism criticizes the inconsistency of modernism, but refuses to be held to norms of consistency itself. Some other critiques have pointed out that postmodernism still leaves deeper questions about the roots of oppression and marginalization unanswered.

II. Conclusion:

Though one cannot define the term post modernism, it's something that is a way of looking at things around us, it's a perspective or more of an intellectual movement that sees there is no absolute truth and every text has many meanings in it. This

is a philosophy that is famous for its playfulness. For Post moderns, there is no truth, no fact, so one right way to understand nature or a text, and ultimately objectivity is a myth for a post-modernist. It is liberal in nature and believes in breaking all the shackles of science and a system of authoritative truth. It believes in subjectivities and not objectivity and empiricism. Despite post modernism being absurd to many, confusing to others, it's a very significant paradigm in the theories of development. Therefore , influence of the Post Modern theory is so influential that even those who are anti-post modernism have fallen prey to or have been captivated to what is called as the "postmodern".

References:

- [1]. Agger, Ben. (1991). Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance, Annual Review of Sociology, 17, pp.105-131.
- [2]. Baert, P, D. Weinberg and V. Mottier (2011). Social Constructionism, Postmodernism and Deconstructionism, in I.



- Jarvie and J. Bonilla (eds), Sage Handbook of the Philosophy of Social Sciences. London: Sage Publications, PP. 475-86.
- [3]. Benjamin, A. (2006). Deconstruction in S. Malpas and P. Wake (eds), The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory. London: Routledge, PP. 81-90.
- [4]. Brown, Doug (1992). Institutionalism and Postmodern Politics of Social change. *Journal of Economy Issues*, 26:2 (June), pp-545-552.
- [5]. Brown, W. (2006). Power After Foucault, in J. Dryzek, B. Honig and A. Phillips (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory. London: Oxford University Press, PP. 65-84.
- [6]. Barsky, R. (2001). Postmodernity, in V. Taylor and C. Winquist (eds), *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, PP. 304-08.
- [7]. Carter, D. (2012). *Literary Theory*. UK: Oldcastle Books.
- [8]. Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [9]. Eagleton, T. (1996). *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. New York: Blackwell Publishing.
- [10]. Foucault, M. (1965). *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London: Routledge.
- [11]. Foucault, M. (1969). *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*. New York: Harper Colophon.
- [12]. Foucault, M. (1980). *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- [13]. Foucault, M. (1983). The Subject and Power, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [14]. Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- [15]. Margaroni, M. (2001). Jacques Derrida, in V. Taylor and C. Winquist (eds), *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, PP. 92-94.
- [16]. Malpas, S. (2005). *The Postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- [17]. Ritzer, G. (1997). *Postmodern Social Theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- [18]. Vincent, A. (2004). *The Nature of Political Theory*. New York: Oxford.

