

### CHAPTER THREE

#### DERRIDA AND CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PHILOSOPHERS

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in his essay on *différance*, Derrida rejects the possibility of metaphysics and denies that difference should be seen as a theological concept. For him, it is not something behind language in the manner, in which the transcendent ‘God’ is behind negative theology. Many people comment that both God of negative theology and *différance* are different. The reason is, the God of negative theology functions as an ultimate or a higher reality where *différance* does not. According to John D. Caputo “*différance*, is not the God of negative theology..... Negative theology is always on the track of a “hyperessentiality”, of something hyper-present, hyper-real or sur-real, so really real that we are never satisfied simply to say that it is merely real..... *Différance* is but a quasi-transcendental anteriority, not a supereminent, transcendent ulteriority.”<sup>105</sup> His *différance* is the surpassing of onto-theology and philosophy itself. Some critics believe that Derrida was conscious of the theological meanings of *différance* from early in his career and this is not a recent preoccupation. According to Habermas “Derrida does not want to think theologically; as an orthodox Heideggerian, he [Derrida] is forbidden any thought about a supreme entity...As he assures us at the start of his essay on “*différance*”, he does not want to do any theology, not even negative theology”<sup>106</sup>.

After discussing Derrida’s key term ‘deconstruction’ in the previous chapter this chapter tries to throw light on Derrida’s relationship with contemporary French philosophers.

#### Ferdinand de Saussure:

Structuralism is a kind of method or approach rather than as a discipline, its aim is to analyze isolated events or meaning in terms of their underlying structural laws. The founding father of structuralist method of analysis is Ferdinand de Saussure, who is a specialist in phonology. It means the study of language as a system of sounds. He coined a new linguistic theory which came to be known as ‘semiology’, which means a science (*logos*) of signs (*semeia*). His approach is to treat language as a self-regulating rather than referential system of signs. Saussure’s writings are highly technical, he proposed some important distinctions; distinctions between language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*), signifier and signified,

---

<sup>105</sup> John D Caputo, *The prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida*, 1997, p 2-3.

<sup>106</sup> J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 1987, p 165.

semiology and semantics, system and realization, synchrony and diachrony. The distinction between *langue* and *parole* are; *langue* is defined as the systematic totality of all possible linguistic usages but *parole* refers to any particular act of language. Another distinction is *langue* is a universal and timeless system, whereas *parole* belongs to now and here. The point is Saussure didn't deny the importance of these dimensions of speech. But he just affirmed that they were not primary. Saussure stated, "if *langue* is the whole of language, *parole* is the part (or multiplicity of parts) which operates within the whole"<sup>107</sup>.

Structuralisms do not pay much attention to what is written in the text. Saussure's one of the famous maxim is 'language is a form, not a substance'<sup>108</sup>. According to him the meaning of a sentence is found in its structure, not in its sentence. He gives priority to language over speech. Saussure had a strong impact on Derrida in the sense that structuralists are used language to organize and to construct reality. For them, language enables us to give meaning to the world. Meaning is through its relationship to other things, even no single thing gives off meaning of its own accord. For structuralists, verbal and written language provides the demonstration of these structural or relational properties of meaning. Here Saussure, with reference to other words, tried to know the meaning of words. For him, language is an arbitrary system. In linguistic structuralism, his contribution is that there is no natural bond in between words and things that is why he believed that all of our culture is made up of sign.

The sign is a kind of device through which human beings are able to communicate with each other. Verbal and written language offered that through a system of arbitrary social conventions, how signs made meaning. Therefore linguistics could provide a strong basis for a 'scientific study about life of signs' in society. This could be called semiology or semiotics. Not only Derrida but there are some other postmodernists like Jean Baudrillard, Judith Williamson, and Pierre Macherey, those who are influenced by Saussure, they all argued that "we should try to find out fundamental order behind texts. Texts not only try to cover over their own internal gaps and conflicts, but are created out of the meanings they omit or repress: what a text puts 'outside' of itself determines what it says. Poststructuralism does not necessarily believe that everything is meaningless; just that meaning is never final"<sup>109</sup>.

Here Jacques Derrida reminds us that human subject is inscribed by language and in language, not only in formal condition but also in historical and material matter of the

---

<sup>107</sup> Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, 1986, p 241

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, p 240.

<sup>109</sup> S.L. Doshi, *Modernity Postmodernity and Neo-sociological Theories*, 2003, p 332

subjects determination, he or she is a function or effect of language, there is no subjectivity without language. So, one can refer to speech or some other system of signs. However, Saussure gives importance to language though he differentiates speech from language. He understands language as essentially phonic, means spoken (speech) not as a graphic. In this sense, Derrida departs from Saussurean linguistics. According to him, language is a form of writing and he gives this notion to incorporate any system of signs. He rejects the Saussurean *phonocentric* model of the system of language.

Derrida sees that Saussure as being trapped in phonocentrism. For him, meanings (regarded as a 'presence' in the text) and truths are never absolute. They are determined by the social and historical conditions, there can be no knowledge, which is outside of history and culture. 'Grammatology' is a term which has been coined by Derrida. For him, it is a type of knowledge (is a writing which is manifestation of knowledge). Writing is of two types, one is 'graphic notion on tangible materials', for example: drafting on a paper, and writing latter. The other is natural or living writing. In this type of writing, we erase the word which already written by us and in the same place we write another alternative. For this reason, Derrida is concerned with this type of writing. They both use writing in the sense of a sign. But the difference between them is that Saussure uses 'signs' in terms of binary sign, for example male/female, and white/black. Derrida does not use it in the sense of binary. According to Derrida, the essential part of writing is 'erasure'- which makes him a 'grammatologist'.

#### Emmanuel Levinas:

Both Derrida and Levinas belonged to the second generation of phenomenology. They both began their view with philosophical significations which always pre-supposes the signifying activity of our intentional consciousness. If we see, Derrida's earliest writings on *différance*, he himself has acknowledged the powerful influence of Levinas's theory of the other. Even Levinas's thought was influenced by Heidegger's *Being and Time*. "The Heidegger of *Being and Time* presents us with an elucidation of the nature of Dasein in terms of its 'pre-theoretical' understanding of Being and develops an analysis of the other through an ontological investigation of Dasein's existential composition that begins by asserting its individuated nature (the claim that the Being of every Dasein is in each and every case 'mine'). Levinas, in contrast, argues for an approach that places emphasis upon the metaphysical preconditions of all ontology, and such preconditions exceed the mere 'mineness' of Dasein's self-awareness. In this way, Heidegger's claim to the possibility of an

overcoming of metaphysics through ontology is challenged by Levinas”<sup>110</sup>. But for Levinas, “the word metaphysics is the tendency of thought to transcend the limits of its own particularity and seek out the other”.<sup>111</sup> At the beginning of *Totality of Infinity*, Levinas mentioned about metaphysics that “is turned toward the “elsewhere” and the “otherwise” and ‘other’”.<sup>112</sup>

In the title *Convergence and Divergence*, Derrida owes a considerable philosophical debt to Levinas. For Levinas, “then, the ethical relation – and ethics is simply and entirely the event of this relation – is one in which I am related to the face of the other (*le visage d’autrui*), where the French word ‘*autrui*’ refers to the other human being, whom I cannot evade, comprehend, or kill and before whom I am called to justice, to justify myself”<sup>113</sup>. He stated that the other always encountered by face. “The notion of the face...opens other perspectives”<sup>114</sup>. Like Levinas, Derrida maintains that the other precedes Philosophy and ‘necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin’. Derrida approves of certain aspects of Levinas’ critical interpretation of phenomenology and influenced by the Hebraic tradition through Levinas. While commenting on Levinas’ ethics, Derrida has remarked, ‘ethics is wholly other, and yet is the some word’. Ethics is wholly other because Levinas has taken it beyond the traditional metaphysical determination. According to Levinas my relation with the other is not simply a relation with a thing but it is a relationship with someone “over whom it is impossible to assert power, for they cannot be ‘possessed’ in the fashion in which things can be possessed”<sup>115</sup>. However, Derrida notes Levinasian ethics as transcendence towards the other and because of which, he prefers to call it an ‘ethics of ethics’.

On the one hand, Derrida adopts an attitude of undeniable and irreducible respect towards Levinas and on the other, he deconstructs Levinas’s ethics. Derrida elsewhere remarks that we are not denouncing here, an incoherence of language or a contradiction in the system. We are wondering about the meaning of necessity, the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it. Thus, Derrida’s ethics, unlike the ethics of Levinas, begins by postulating that ‘*tout autre est tout autre*’ (every other is totally other).

---

<sup>110</sup> Peter Sedgwick, *Descartes to Derrida: An Introduction to European Philosophy*, 2001 p 179.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 1961, p 33

<sup>113</sup> Simon, Critchley *The Ethics of Deconstruction Derrida and Levinas*, 1992, p 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Totality and Infinity*, 1996, p 51.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

In the title *The Ethical Responsibility of 'Saying'*, Alphonse attempts to show in what sense Levinas affirms that language (the ethical 'saying') is intrinsic to the ethical relation. In this regard, Levinas in his work entitled *Otherwise than Being* makes a distinction between 'saying' and 'said'. He then characterizes the former as ethical discourse and the latter as ontological. The 'saying' must include the 'said' due to the necessity of the same order. Since the ontological 'said' has always betrayed the ethical 'saying', Levinas explores how the 'said' can be moderated and be overlooked by considering the 'saying' as the trace of the 'said' as an irruption and an interpretation of ethics in the ontology. According to Levinas, ethics is not simply the absence of ontology; it is rather a deconstruction of ontology, a revelation of its weaknesses and the ersatz of its mastery. Ethics, therefore, pre-exists ontology and accordingly precedes existence and essence. For Alphonse 'saying' is another way of characterizing ethical responsibility which opens up the ethical relation to testimony. Derrida says that as soon he related to the other he can respond to his call only by sacrificing ethics by sacrificing what obliges me to respond in the same way. It concerns choice and decision which must go beyond calculative reasoning and anticipatory modes. According to Derrida, if a decision cannot be deduced from knowledge or from family and religious traditions, whoever makes this decision is alone. However, before the 'undecidable', the decision cannot be deferred, for responsibility for the other demands a decision here and now. Ethics, with its dependence on generality, must continuously be sacrificed in order to make a decision. Derrida describes this situation of aporia as follows: "I cannot answer to the call, to the demand, to the obligation, or even to the love of the other without sacrificing to him the other other, the other others"<sup>116</sup>.

However, we can assess here, of course following Derrida, is that a responsible appreciation for aporia actually demands a respect for the universal as well as for the particular and therefore a responsible treatment of the alterity commands recognition of the universal as well as the particular. In fact, responsibility for any individual is only possible by irresponsibility towards all others. Following Derrida, it can be said that no choice can be justified, because 'every other is totally other'. If every other is totally other, be it, God or Human persons, ethics is no longer confined to the domain of generality as expounded by Kierkegaard. It is also the respect for the absolute singularity as recalled by Levinas.

---

<sup>116</sup> Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ, *Postmodernity An Indian Appraisal*, "Tears that See...Do You Believe? Derrida's Deconstruction of Husserl and Levinas, 2008, p 161.

As far as the norms of ethics are concerned, Abraham is murdered according to Kierkegaard. If God had not prevented him from sacrificing his son, the civilized society would have accused him beyond doubt of infanticide. Reflecting upon Kierkegaard, Derrida at once remarks that the same society (of neighbors or of fellow beings of whom ethics or the discourse on human rights speaks), without any moral or legal court competent to judge the sacrifice. Here sacrifice of the other is meant of not sacrificing oneself. Such a society not only takes part in but also organizes this incalculable sacrifice. The genesis of Derrida's position actually hinges on the point that each other has to be considered in his or her singularity. The other important aspect of Derrida in this regard is that he does not refer to a future which will one day become present, but to an unconditional openness towards an unknown future. This irreducibility of the other is pertinently conceived as a radical openness to the future. Derrida, in fact, does not affirm the other who is present, rather he has emphasized on what he termed as 'metaphysics of presence'.

If we see the conversation between Richard Kearney and Derrida, Kearney asked a question that does you agree with Levinas that Judaism offers an alternative to the Greek metaphysics of presence? Here Derrida argued, "Though I was born a Jew, I do not work or think within a living Jewish Tradition. So that if there is a Judaic dimension to my thinking which may from time to time have spoken in or through me, this has never assumed the form of an explicit fidelity or debt to that culture. In short, the ultimate site (*lieu*) of my questioning discourse would be neither Hellenic nor Hebraic if such were possible. It would be a non-site beyond both the Jewish influence of my youth and the Greek philosophical heritage which I received during my academic education in the French universities."<sup>117</sup>

#### Lévi-Strauss:

Derrida's relation with post-structuralism is just like his engagement with phenomenology. For him, structuralism and phenomenology these two are the twin poles of the twentieth century. *Of Grammatology* contains the analysis of Lévi-Strauss. Here Derrida gave attention to Lévi-Strauss who was a French anthropologist. He applied structural linguistics of Saussure to the study of anthropology and in particular myth. He has no time for the literary use of structuralism, His main objection "to literary structuralism was to its attempt to apply the techniques of, for example, the anthropological analysis of myths to individual texts."<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, p 107.

<sup>118</sup> Christina Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics*, 1998, p 34.

Levi-Strauss's argument was based on the binary opposition between culture and nature. According to him, culture is perverse, corrupting and nature is natural, pure even it is innocent. He favors nature over culture and sees writing as a supplement to speech (natural speech), which is perverse. Lévi-Strauss conceived writing as an ideological and broad historical term which seem to invite deconstructive reading. But unlike Saussure to Derrida's theory of textual process, he contributed little. Here Derrida begins his deconstruction with making a distinction between text and discourse. For him, within the experience of the person who reads or writes a text discourse indicates the living, present and conscious re-presentation of the text, whereas text exceeds such re-presentation by its own laws and the entire system of resources. There is a problem between text and discourse and Derrida's deconstruction tried to operate this problematic zone. He deconstructs Lévi-Strauss's *The Writing Lesson*. This is the chapter of Lévi-Strauss's book *Tristes Tropiques*, a sad topic. "This book is an extended and sweetly melancholy farewell to a world which ceased to exist between the 1930s, when Lévi-Strauss was there, and 1955, when his book was published."<sup>119</sup>

*Tristes Tropiques* is the story about Nambikwara, a tribe in the wilds of Brazil. Here in this tribe, Lévi-Strauss sees the example of primitive naturalness. This tribe knows only speaking. They don't know writing. For this reason, Lévi-Strauss feels guilty. He admires there open and communal sexuality, closeness to nature. Everything they know through myth rather than through science. *The Writing Lesson* begins with the population of Nambikwara tribe. In 1938 when Lévi-Strauss visit in this tribe the population was only 2000. "They also constitute the goal of the ethnographer's professional quest."<sup>120</sup> "I had been looking for a society reduced to its simplest expression. That of the Nambikwara was so truly simple that all I could find in it was individual human beings."<sup>121</sup> He distributes some paper and pencils among the non-literate tribes and when he writes something in his notebook, observes that the tribes drawing some wavy lines. Actually, they are just mimicking what they see. The chief person of the tribe was the only one who understands the actual purpose of writing. The chief grasped the meaning of writing as a matter of power and if he convenes his companions that he was the master of that white men's writing then his power will be enhanced. Lévi-Strauss realizes that the chief understands writing to reinforce his authority and prestige but not to

---

<sup>119</sup> Levi Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 1973. As quoted in *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva*, by Michael Payne, 1993, p 142

<sup>120</sup> Jayant Prasad, *Derrida: The Father of Deconstruction*, november 19, 2007.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Payne, *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva*, 1993, p 143.

understand to remember knowledge. Therefore, he reconsiders the common view that writing is a form of artificial memory, it increased human's ability to preserve knowledge, which makes possible a sharp view about the past that it has the ability to organize the present and the future, which indicates the distinction between civilization and barbarism. But Lévi-Strauss rejects this thought. According to Lévi-Strauss, after the birth of writing for 5,000 years, knowledge was not increased but only fluctuated. The reason behind this, there was no vast difference between Greek and Roman citizen's life from an eighteenth century (European middle-class). "These reflections lead Lévi-Strauss to the conclusion that writing seems to have favored the exploitation rather than the development of human beings."<sup>122</sup>

Lévi-Strauss was the major founder of the modern structuralism. Both Derrida and Lévi-Strauss's objection was not identical but there was much common with it. According to Lévi-Strauss, both biological and linguistic structuralism doesn't describe a particular configuration as unfinished or unsatisfactory and each totality they examine as a complete entity. Linguistics, anthropology, and biology these three have a number of versions of the same phenomenon to compare and "Literary critics can only do something similar by imposing a finalistic interpretation on an author's production."<sup>123</sup> Derrida admits although this is a critical version of a problem which regularly found in all structuralism. Therefore structuralism is not teleological it is only descriptive however it has some difficulty to describe an organized totality in practice. Thus, nature/culture opposition is the central for the whole history of Western philosophy and Derrida starts from this opposition. For Lévi-Strauss, this opposition has both essential to use and impossible to believe.

From modernism to postmodernism was not a kind of compartmentalized journey rather postmodernism was contested terrain. There are some inner differences which make the following three figures remarkable; M. Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and J. F. Lyotard. They agree and disagree with each other. These differences and disagreements are made them part with each other.

---

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p 144

<sup>123</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 1998, p 34

Jean-Francois Lyotard:

Lyotard a non-sociologist contributed to the development of postmodernity. The *Postmodern Condition* is one of the most popular and well-known treatises, which deals with the concept of postmodernity. Here he claims that both in the society and in the production of knowledge transformation postmodern rethinking is necessary. The major themes of his book are to condemn or criticize the consensual theories of Weber, Durkheim, and others. In the *Sociological Theory*, Bentz and Kenny mentioned that “Order’ theories of Spencer, Comte, Durkheim, Merton, Parsons, and Sumner have lulled us into belief that we are part of a ‘real’ social order which protects, balances, and regulates our activities. ‘Conflict’ theories from Marx, Simmel, and Mills to Marcuse and Habermas, while revealing that all was not right with this ‘ordered’ world, have reaffirmed the possibility of a re-ordered and right world. Marxist, neo-Marxist theorists present the hope that some group – the workers, the students, or the new professional class – may bring about a more just social order.”<sup>124</sup>

In his discussion of postmodernity Lyotard offers a new turn. According to him, postmodernism is not a beginning of a new era and not a new epoch; rather it is within modernism a recurrent historical phase. For him, undoubtedly it is the part of the modern. The thoughts which we ascribed as postmodernism exist before. He thought that one work can only be modern when it is postmodern. *The Postmodern Conditions* is a classical work of Lyotard, where he defines postmodernity and metanarratives. In this book, he explained the meaning of postmodern. He said that “simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives.”<sup>125</sup> Thus through this statement, it is clear that he is against about all the totalization of society. He attacks to all the emancipatory and all scientific grand narrative which is associated with the enlightenment. Postmodernism involves a critical re-examination of the thought of the enlightenment. Here he used the word ‘postmodern’ to describe the state of knowledge. It has been generally undertaken that the status of knowledge is changed as cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age, as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age. For this reason, he remarked that postmodernism is a kind of movement which has a reference to a vast field of activities; such as drama, dance, art, women’s movements, and architecture to culture.

---

<sup>124</sup> S.L Doshi, *Modernity Postmodernity and Neo-sociological Theories*, 2003, p 311.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p 312.

The *Postmodern Condition* is not an academic document rather it is a kind of report which has assumed all importance. Because Lyotard raised some important questions about the field of knowledge and during that time some vast changes occur in the society and culture. That time scientific disciplines are no longer assume the time theories and discoveries that are regarded as timeless value or universal. Lyotard stands on scientific knowledge, and mentioned, “Knowledge related to human emancipation of the kind initiated by enlightenment and modernity.”<sup>126</sup> It tries to find out the form and nature of knowledge. Through this, he criticized the metanarratives of social sciences and particularly sociology. The first question is how the form of knowledge comes into being? The second one is who controls it? And third is, who has access to knowledge?

Lyotard explained that the postmodern era is the continuation of the modern era. It is not the beginning of a new era. He commented that “We have had postmodern phases before modernism. Postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but a nascent state, and this state is recurrent.”<sup>127</sup> It is a social movement, a process. So whenever disenchantment with modernity comes; the postmodernity emerges. He pointed out that knowledge about society and people are never coherent rather it is a task of postmodernity to study multiple pieces of knowledge about peoples and society. Now, society is charged with many problems and becoming increasingly multi-cultural. So, people’s lifestyles are becoming more cosmopolitan. Thus, there is no agreement about what is worth believing. But for him, the only solution lies in the postmodernity. For that type of society, he argues that there cannot be a timeless or universal body of knowledge. His definition of postmodernity lies in his thought on grand narratives, which are also called meta-narratives or metanarratives. For him, the thing which is narrated or told is called narrative. But there was a technical meaning of narratives, which Anthony Giddens offered: “Metanarratives are broad overarching theories or beliefs about the operation of society and the nature of social change. Marxism and functionalism are examples of metanarratives that have been employed by sociologists to explain how the world works. Postmodernists reject such ‘grand theories’, arguing that it is impossible to identify any fundamental truths underpinning human society.”<sup>128</sup>

However, Lyotard’s rejections of metanarratives are simple and definite. He mentioned that both scientific and cultural narratives think that all societies are uniform and their identity,

---

<sup>126</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, 1984 As quoted in Modernity, Postmodernity and Neo-Sociological Theories, 2003, p 313*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid, p 314*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid, p 315*

problems, and ethnicity are the same. These assumptions were not accepted by Lyotard and because of this their society and knowledge stuff were in a state of damage which cannot be repaired or stored elsewhere. So the metanarratives and the theories which are propounded by their authors have failed to do justice to mankind. For this reason, all these theories are responsible for the degeneration of society. Therefore generating a new knowledge must be required for the health of this society.

Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* attacked mainly two types of metanarratives; such as (i) emancipatory or cultural metanarratives, which are associated with reason, experience, traditional authority and skepticism of religion. For him these appear in sociology from enlightenment, which are liberalism, secularism, and democratization of human society; and these are all responsible for totalitarianism, war, and also a gap between the poor and rich. For this reason, Lyotard rejects these metanarratives.

(ii) The second one is scientific metanarratives. Here his bold observation was that in the scientific knowledge there was no truth and it has no direct access to truth. For example: when television or social media shows advertisement about some brands like shampoo, toothpaste, and creams. They try to convince others. This is the way through which they create public awareness. So, they are giving knowledge about their experiment. He comments, truth is something which is created by people. Therefore truth can never be timeless and universal.

According to Lyotard, both emancipatory narratives and scientific narratives are forms of knowledge but these forms are different. Emancipatory narratives includes denotative statements which shows know-how, how to listen, knowing how to live, how to eat. So basically this narrative gives some down to earth rules or pragmatic rules to the people. Thus these narratives helped to bound society and in this way knowledge becomes the legitimate store house of society. This legitimacy comes from the simple fact that they do what they want to do. As a form of knowledge, scientific narratives are also denotative statements. Here the reference is the only truth. Thus, from this perspective, these narratives do not have the elements of sharing. Therefore they do not establish any social bonds.

The metatheories of conflict and functionalism are considered as totalistic theories by Lyotard. Here totalization means constituting or comprising an entirety or a whole. And the theory of functionalism claims to study all the societies of the world; so it is universal and stands for an ordered society. During the period of modernization, they exercised their

dominance. Functionalism propagated the ideology of capitalism, totalitarianism, and elitism. But Marxism promised for a stateless and classless socialism. On the other hand, a conflict theory argues the society is never consensual. According to them “the history of all the societies is the history of class war.”<sup>129</sup>

For Lyotard, there is a relationship between emancipator and scientific narratives. Here Wittgenstein explained that these both narratives are characterized by ‘language games’. Lyotard’s thought about that is social relationships are just like a game which required language in order to participate and that type of languages required the minimum relationship for society to exist. Thus for him, language games are the social bond. He notes that always science has been in conflict with narratives. He concluded that never scientific knowledge gives truth ;so why accept them when the metanarratives do not carry any truth. Lyotard gives some key ideas about scientific truth: (i) knowledge is never universal; rather always it is altered when traditional societies become modern and when modern societies are becoming postmodern. The pace of knowledge is slower or faster depending on the country. And according to the sector of activity within countries, the pace of knowledge varies. So, if the knowledge had given the truth then it would never have changed. Thus the science does not give the absolute truth according to Lyotard. (ii) Scientific knowledge is a discourse; a framework of thinking. Here we mention one important point of Foucault. He shows that our knowledge regarding madness, punishment, and sexuality have changed through the periods of history. So, clearly it shows that knowledge in all its respects is a discourse; there is nothing about its neutrality. Even in the present information age, scientific knowledge is a subject to technological transformation. Today the perfect way for the transmission of our knowledge is cybernetics. Our knowledge gets commercialized through machines. (iii) According to Lyotard, when technologically knowledge is transformed then it tends to become quantitative. The fact is, this is the age of technological development. So the nature of knowledge is not stored without changing. Here we can only estimate that anything in the structure of knowledge could not be transformed through the machine. Consequently, the direction of research will change. Here those researches are accepted which are into computer language translatable. Thus the knowledge which are generated from sociological or anthropological are transmitted through the computer.

---

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p 316.

Therefore, Lyotard talks about both scientific and social-cultural narratives. For him, about science, our assumptions are demolished in the context of present-day society. Thus the scientific narratives do not have any legitimacy. Lyotard mentioned that in the period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, people had great faith in science. That time Max Weber argued for sociological knowledge. Rationality is the core value of modernity and correlated it with science. During those days scientific assumptions functioned with the same vigour. For example: in Indian television, there are advertisement regarding flood situation. Basically, the aim of the advertisement is to sell their commodity. Thus, at the end of the Second World War Lyotard claimed that most of the scientific myths are collapsed. So, now what has remained is just a little science, not the big scientific narratives.

He draws a parallel between the social-cultural narratives and scientific narratives. Since the coherent scientific knowledge was caught as specialisms therefore in culture and social life appeared a splintering. In cultural and social life, appeared a splintering. He found many narratives; such as cultural theory, political theory, and art criticism. However in the later edition of the book *Postmodern Condition* he includes a postscript. This postscript concentrated on aesthetic rather than scientific issues. His writing had a great impact on humanities and science. His main concern was about the forms of knowledge and its ability for production. But the experiments which he has performed put a lot of effect on humanities, social thoughts, and politics. He was influenced very much by Marxism. According to Marxism, the class was the main instrument of exploitation and the proletariat class was universal, which leads the revolution for socialism. But Lyotard and other postmodernists have not accepted this Marxian position. According to him, any single class, factor or structure could not bring revolution. His plea was that the modern political theory was never coherent in its structure. It is because in the area of political theories there are much fluid social groups and identities which would never lead to any revolution. For him, there is no single knowledge but there is knowledge. Because each ethnic group has their own knowledge and knowledge is splintered as well as his class formulations are disintegrated. He argued that the Marxian class war has witnessed fragmentation.

Thus the impact of Lyotard's experiments about the status of knowledge was greater in the field of cultural and social realms of life. To the postmodernist, the power is not monolithically concentrated in state or class only; rather through little works of everyday life, it exerted. He holds that the present era is the small-scale acts of dissent. If we see any city in India then we can find some disruptions of traffic in the market which is a common

phenomenon. There are demonstrations, processions of agitating people and rallies. Actually, all these agitations disrupt the social system. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century he analyzed the state of scientific knowledge and information. His major and basic argument is that since society and culture are continuously in a changing mode, therefore, the scientific discipline does not believe that their discoveries and theories have timeless or universal value.

### Michel Foucault:

It is now time to discuss the philosophy of Michel Foucault (1926 - 1984). Francis Bacon, one of the most important philosopher's comments, "human knowledge and human power came to the same thing, because ignorance of cause frustrates effect."<sup>130</sup> The relationship between knowledge and power is like cause and effect. For example, in India, village gossiping is a normal thing. It may so happen that if someone faces a lion in a forest, then after coming back he may spread the news and slowly this news assumes the form of knowledge. But in the present era, there are an enormous amount of data in the proliferation of electronic system which (data) stored in that place which is accessible to those individuals, institutions, corporations, and governments- whose requests are deemed legitimate for such knowledge. But that same data are not acceptable to the subject who contributed that information. That time in the postmodern world, which have a larger store of data or knowledge only they are powerful. But for Michel Foucault, it was the dominant theme of discourse. He does not accept knowledge as power; rather contributed as a context or way to exercise of power. According to him, knowledge does not itself provide any predictable, inevitable effects. But power can produce itself knowledge. Particularly, his concern is too timely given the way in which about individuals all informations are evaluated, stored and monitored in modern society. Basically, they tried to abolish the classic enlightenment distinction between a private and public realm.

However, Foucault a poststructuralist also known as a postmodernist and by his thinking, the postmodern social theory was powerfully affected. He has directed some specific empirical studies; such as the human sciences, medicine and the birth of clinical practices, madness, and asylum. There are other works: the social control of sexuality and self and sexuality. Even among the postmodernists, he was known as the architect of the theory of the relationship between knowledge and power. In the thinking of sociology, the relation between knowledge and power has made a dominant shift which challenged Weber's theory of power.

---

<sup>130</sup> S.L.Doshi, p 283.

His works include a number of disciplines in sociology, criminology, history, and philosophy. He was influenced by Hegel's work on phenomenology and Nietzsche's work. Marx, Freud, and Structuralism are included in his work too. However, he claimed that he was never been a Marxist, never been a Freudian and never been a structuralist. His central theme was to establish knowledge and power relationship. For this, he borrowed some various sources and tried to integrate them. For him knowledge gives power. He was influenced by Weber's rationalization theory. But according to Foucault rationalization is found in only certain key sites, which is not an iron case. Although he borrowed Marx's ideas, he goes beyond Marx's economic determinism. Mainly he was interested in micro-politics of power and this conceptualization of power was multidisciplinary. Therefore when Marx thinks about power, it is a total power which is based at the societal level. As a phenomenologist, he rejects the idea of an autonomous and meaning-giving subject. He adopts Nietzsche's interests especially the relationship between knowledge and power, which was analyzed by Foucault sociologically. Besides all these influences he was described as a poststructuralist.

Foucault's main concern lies in the field of epistemology. Here he tried to uncover knowledge. His search for knowledge led him to find out power. Finally, he connects power with truth. But before he took up his search for truth, Nietzsche in his work *Genealogy of Morals* analyzed good and evil. Here he comments that there was no original or essential definition about truth. Foucault carried this argument further. According to him, the truth was tied to the operation of power and domination. Thus truth is produced by power. For him, knowledge, power, and truth are interconnected. And power is assumes different role in society. His theme was the concept of discourse. He argued that knowledge, power, and truth are connected through discourses and texts. Discourse means disciplines and institutions. Crime, leadership, corruption, industrialization, village development, environment, and capitalism are all discourse. These are the stuff of society. For example: in Indian society family is a kind of discourse. Before industrialization joint family played the main role in society. But today's scenario is totally different. Nuclear family is the call of the hour. Public views were changed. Thus Foucault argued that discourse always keeps changing. It is not images and abstract public sphere; rather it exists in a concrete social situation, which has real effects.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault mentioned that madness is a discourse. Through the period of history, people developed their specific framework of thinking about the insane and the mad. For instance, in the period of renaissance reason and madness were not separated.

There was a dialogue between madness and reason. Foucault argued that “by the middle ages, the people, that is, the mad were locked up with those who suffered from leprosy. Leprosy is not only contagious but also disturbing to look at. Everyone was happy about it, but what were they supposed to do with these big places to lock people up? They left them empty, but just for a while. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, an idea cropped up, and became a central image in the popular imagination. People came to know anyhow that the madman may have dangerous insights.”<sup>131</sup> Here Foucault’s main concern is towards generation of knowledge and it helps people to get power.

Actually, Foucault was not interested in madness; rather he was trying to know especially knowledge about psychiatry. According to him madhouses, hospitals, prisons, and workhouses are part of a broad system to judge and to oppress people. For example: in the Renaissance period there was an economic crisis and there were agitations. After that, there emerged a shift in the analysis of the mad. Thus in history for the first time institution of morality was formed combining civil law and moral obligation. Especially morality, virtue, and goodness are the responsibilities of the state. With discourse through centuries he traced out the history of madness and in 1960s The French Revolution was a turning point in the discourse on insanity.

In France, Jean-Paul Sartre was at the top of intellectual rank before Foucault. After Sartre, we find varieties of literary critics such as Roland Barthes, the radical psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and a poststructuralist Michel Foucault. Foucault’s writing *The Order of Things* poses a direct challenge to the humanism of Sartre.

The above essay examines three main areas of human sciences, such as linguistics, biology, and economics. Here Foucault tries to find out the structure of knowledge of time and its way of establishing order. But in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century he started to examine the development of the fields such as general grammar, natural history, and analysis of wealth. Here he questions about the death of man, which was parallel with Friedrich Nietzsche’s word that God is dead. For him, before 18<sup>th</sup>-century humans are not the centres of discourse. Before that period humans are never regarded as a centre of the universe. God played the central role at that time. God’s knowledge was infinite but human knowledge was limited. So, God was

---

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p 289.

the source of knowledge. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the scenarios changed completely, instead of God human were at the center as the source of knowledge.

*Existence precedes essence*- this slogan of Sartre becomes the centre point of attraction. Here essence means ultimate or real nature of an individual. For Sartre, the meaning of things or essence was not predetermined by any outside force. It is the humans who played the lead role in ascribing meaning to everything. For him, there is no transcendental meaning but human-centric meaning played the lead role. Foucault followed the above procedure. But the problem is with Sartre's notion of existential freedom is, there is no meaning which is predetermined. Humans (each person) are free to create their own meaning through their own actions. But the freedom is something which is itself given, which either we accept it or try to deny it. According to Foucault by social conditioning (which surrounds the individual) individual's freedom was constrained or limited. But structuralist Simon de Beauvoir questioned the Sartre's notion of individual freedom, and the most powerful advocate of social conditions (economic determinism) Karl Marx also rejects this thesis of Sartre. Saussure and some structuralists helped Foucault to form his theories. According to Saussure, in any language (Hindi, English, and French) the relationship between signifier to signified is arbitrary. Because the collection of sounds and letters makes the word 'cow' (signifier) does not itself connected with the animal which we see in the field (signified). The reason is, in a different language, a cow is called by different words. Saussure made two important points: (i) sound and the words are not related with the real object. (ii) Language should be signified 'is at the discretion and social conditioning of the individual.' Earlier it observed that Foucault studied three human sciences. In linguistic, he analyzed the general grammar of languages. (a) Here he examines Saussure and argues that words do not have anything to do with the objects which they signify, and this is the language which gives meaning. (b) In the natural history, he discusses about the biology of the body. (c) In the analysis of economics, he focussed on wealth.

In structuralism, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Foucault believed that binary oppositions are not only found in language but these are found in knowledge and social structure. The binding binary oppositions can be best understood by freezing time and looking at a single moment. For them, the structure of language was a dominant one. Language is the centre fore which binds people. So, one is not free to think anything outside the rules of one's language. However, the difference between Sartre and Foucault is that for Sartre, the meanings of things are constructed by men, which is predetermined. But according to Foucault the

meaning of things are not given by men; rather it is given by language. It was the signified which contains meaning.

Here we are presenting some aspects of Foucault's writing:-

According to him, language is a sign, which he used in his discourse as a tool. He argued that in the course of history there were constant changes in the discourse. For instance, Nietzsche rejected the notions of man and absolute truth. But for Foucault, no absolutes reign and history's search for origin was totally misguided. There are no absolutes.

According to him, knowledge is power, which enables man to identify or invent some techniques and through this, human behavior can be controlled. It rests with the individual. Foucault argued that by power, truth is produced. Thus it was an interpretation tied to the operation of power and domination.

Foucault holds that power is exercised not possessed. It is not essentially coercive or repressive but it can be productive. It flows from the bottom up. It does not flow from a centralized source. And he calls it 'micro-politics'. Power diffused throughout society. It reaches into the grain of individual and then touches their bodies, and itself inserts their discourses, learning processes, attitude, actions, and everyday lives. He mentions that power produces things.

Another aspect of Foucault's vision was, by particular forms of knowledge each historical age was characterized. He ascribes this knowledge from an 'episteme'. It means a set of presupposition which organized and counts knowledge, truth, reality and it indicates how this matter can be discussed.

From the above narratives, it may be commented that there was a difference between Derridean deconstruction and Lyotard and Foucault's postmodern thoughts. But each one has some roots in a different legacy of Nietzsche and Saussure.

Within modernism and postmodernism, the different shades of poststructuralism show a way of conceptualizing the debate between structure-agency. In this schema, some commentator ascribed Derrida as a poststructuralist because of his Saussurian heritage, but there are others who denied this title. Michel Foucault played an important role in Derridean thought. Due to his structural affinity, there are some commentator who thought that deconstructionism is not a method/anti-method; rather it is a development of post-Lévi-Straussian paradigmatic shift

via Nietzsche, Saussure, and Foucault. This happens due to the different varieties of poststructuralist thought in postmodernism. There is a trinity of post-structuralism: Discourse, deconstruction, and postmodernism. There is some kind of overlapping in regarding Derrida's position. There are some divergences between them which exemplified in Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard.

A deconstructionist claimed that postmodern discourse begins with the idea that the system lives of their own and it makes them fundamentally independent of human control. In one side, postmodernists accuse Derrida of being a neo-formalist. But in another side, it claimed that the system doesn't have purposes or meanings. For postmodernism, this abolition of referentiality is the rehabilitation of human agency as he or she was free from the closure (repression) of language. But according to deconstructionism this decentering of human agency lapsed into self-referentiality of the text. So these arguments are goes into a theory of desire, and body in contrast to forms. Thus it is anti-discourse, which is closer to Nietzsche than Saussure.

According to Derrida difference is a unity and at the same time, it is divided from itself. However, it constitutes human discourse and it is intrinsic to all social forms. This focus on difference makes this approach a deconstructionist. Derrida's this radicalized reading of the text's or forms criticized by postmodernism as neo-formalism. But Lyotard read this and chose as a continuum with Derrida. In the case of Lyotard that search was the beginning of the denial of language signifier or text, which is a kind of move towards de-differentiation. Science difference takes place on the forces of elemental passion, a prime energizer. Thus it is more than a theoretical concept. Therefore human action was seen to stem from drives beyond direct human control. So, individual or institutional, and behavioral are essentially are the reaction to an originary force. Here comes 'passions' as a determining movement whose composition organized social life, which also is (passion) a slip from deconstruction to postmodernism from Saussure to Nietzsche, from discourse to free-play and from Derrida to Lyotard. Lyotard's desire is that passion is the prime energizer. According to postmodernist's language, image or idea, and sign or signified these are all secondary processes which inhibited libido and regulate. Thus to rehabilitate the primary forces from the structuration of these secondary processes postmodernism tries to transgresses and therefore di-differentiates.

The similarity between Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida's thought is that, Foucault's genealogical method was similar to Lyotard's agonistics and also similar to Derrida's

deconstruction. They all deny the concept of perfect origin and for it they substitute a process of differential contestation. Derrida's process of differential contestation is a difference of reason and unreason. Therefore the unity of dualism comes. But postmodernism overcomes this dualism in the primacy of unreason – irrationality. According to them, this transgression in a primacy of desire was the answer of the problem of dualism. But Derrida claimed that the difference and postmodern transgress towards de-differentiation. Postmodern thinkers observed that the imminence of the body in social life took as a pervasive critical theme. But according to Foucault, the body is not just a physiological structure; rather it is the place of will, desires, passion, and failings. So, it (body) is the organ of difference. Thus, from Nietzsche to Foucault and to postmodernism, the movement was certainly the postmodernist materiality of the body. Foucault discussed about the materiality of the body and he was a post-structuralist. However, he was not moved into the postmodernist traits of the theory of desire. But his theory of body was not like Lyotard's body of libidinal forces. Because he sees 'the body' as 'the organ in perpetual disintegration' is an 'organ of difference' and in deconstructionism, it moved to become a text of difference.

Here Foucault differs from Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, it has two ways. One is of Saussure moving towards Derrida and second, is Nietzschean diversification to Lyotard. But Foucault was standing in between these two rules. Thus he was criticized by both the camps for his structuralism. For this reason this chapter tries to present these divergences with the structure of four movements:

Saussure's movement towards		Nietzsche's concern about body & desire	
Habermas  (Critical/reflexive modernism)	Derrida  (Deconstructionism)	Foucault	Lyotard
Communicative rationality and ethics of substantial rationality	Aesthetics of difference, text as indeterminate and instable; dualism of rational or irrational, discursive or non-discursive: text/body of the	Will to knowledge against will to power. Transgression of discursive	Aesthetics of de-differentiation; primacy of desire, non-libidinal impulses and double play.

	organization, order/disorder, and double reading; dissent.	by non-discursive; Text as discreet and decomposed into relationship between body and desire.	Anarchy
--	--	---	---------

From the above it may be remarked that the main problem in Foucault is the conflict between the subjects and of course the discourse of which he was a part. According to him, “systems of regularities (which) have a decisive role in the history of the science – to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them.”<sup>132</sup> Therefore, his elaboration is a non-discursive transgression of the will to know and “effect a knowledge which in the density of its workings should be both knowledge and a modification of what is known, reflection and a transformation of the mode of being of that on which it reflects.”<sup>133</sup> Mainly in textuality, Foucault’s interest wanted to present text stripped of its hermetic elements.

But in the case of Derrida, the starting point turns to Saussurean concept of language as the system of difference, and subject as being the product of the language system. For him, the system was a seriality of differences and so that ‘subject is the difference’. But Derrida argued that “essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, the other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences – The play of differences – difference (is) – system in general.”<sup>134</sup> So, it can be concluded that all the words does not share any common meaning but they have a common structure.

<sup>132</sup> M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences*, 1970, p XIII-XIV.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p 327.

<sup>134</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 1982, p- 11.

Postmodernity means a break with the signifier and formalism and from structuralism. It is a new primacy of the bodily and material, of the unconscious and of desire. In this break, there is a rejection of the text, the primacy of the discourse. Thus in contradistinction with Foucault and Lyotard who are in the Nietzschean pedigree, Derrida's inspiration was F. Saussure. Postmodernism takes the social relations to be language games which are governed by the libidinal economy. And for Lyotard, psychic energy is straightaway discharged in the primary process of unconscious and desire. Through the 'unhindered mobility of cathexis'<sup>135</sup> desire is fulfilled but language discursive is the secondary process where through verbalization and transformation energy is discharged.

On the other hand, if we see Freud; his secondary process is "discursive economy of desire through the colonization of the unconscious by discourse; through the subversion of the primary process by language and the transference."<sup>136</sup>

However, the secondary process of Foucault is reversed in postmodernism. Said in his book mentioned that Foucault's reading of texts is different than Derrida. But they theoretically locate or situate texts and they enact more dramatically. Foucault takes curiously the topic that, why and how the power is gained, and how it is used. This is the dangerous consequence of his disagreement with Marxism. However, he criticized Derrida for his reductionist effect of textualization; which was an act of reducing discursive practices to textual traces. If we looked at Foucault's journey then we can see that although he was started as a structuralist but moved toward the theory of body. On the other hand, Freud's central concern was body and unconscious termed as structuralist where libidinal forces become socially structured. Thus this moves of Freudian makes postmodernists took towards Nietzsche and Foucault.

### Richard Rorty:

Richard Rorty (1931-2007) was an American philosopher. He was educated at the Chicago University and Yale University. He was one of the influential philosophers and his philosophical thinking provides a valuable and interesting perspective. Rorty's pragmatism illustrates the relation between ethnocentrism, art-representationalism, and the virtues of the socio-political culture. Rorty and Derrida shares the same thought about epistemological truth claim. According to them, the truth validity claim of epistemology can be questioned. Thus all traditional philosophers have to imagine that they don't have any special truth.

---

<sup>135</sup> Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984, p 58

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, p 106.

Rorty was a pragmatist and he mistrusted all grand theories of history, class consciousness, and knowledge. When he himself claimed as a postmodern *bourgeois* liberal, he distanced his liberalism from the leftists of America. He mentioned that we possess the ‘first-order’ natural narratives; hence to tell the story of stories, any new attempts are the species of grand delusion. Rorty sees grand narrative as ‘Naturalized Hegelianism’. With Habermas, Rorty argues that there is no incommensurable language that any language can be learned through one who was able to use other language. For him, the world is a shadow of our discourse; there is nothing as one to one language world relationship. He mentioned that one of the most socially useful philosophers was Habermas. He sees “Habermas’s theory of ‘communicative reason’ as a giant step towards completing the task that Dewey began reformulating traditional philosophical conceptions in ways that will make them more useful for the self-description of a democratic society”<sup>137</sup>. Here Habermas tries to put philosophy in the work of human emancipation.

As a pragmatist, Rorty explained that since the world can tell us nothing about what really it is, and it can offer us no self descriptions; even since it is neither language nor it is written in language, therefore we must abandon the idea of science as the search for something like the ‘real nature of reality’. According to him, there is no such thing as ‘nature proper’. Rorty argues, “we ought to give up any philosophical attempt to make our criteria appear to be more than simply our criteria, but in addition the right criteria, somehow belonging to nature itself, and thus capable of leading us towards truth”<sup>138</sup>. In another word, nature might be the foundation of a certain conceptions and beliefs, but it could be the cause of the fact that these conceptions are better than others. Thus for Rorty, the history of science just tells us about the theory of gravity. Here he tried to say that how the world guides us to converge on absolute.

Pragmatism denies ‘the possibility of getting beyond’. Here Derrida claims that concepts and discursive totalities are cracked already and it was fissured by heterogeneities and necessary contradictions. Rorty mentioned that Derrida’s work divides into two periods. His earlier period was more professorial period and later period in which his writings are more eccentric, personal, and original. For him, during the earlier period Derrida was involved in public project but later Derrida turned away from philosophy and involved towards literature. Rorty again explained that in the human sciences, Derrida was responsible for moving beyond the

---

<sup>137</sup> Chandini. P.K, *Post-metaphysical thinking and the problem of indeterminacy of truth and meaning – A Critical Study with reference to Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty, chapter-IV, 2002, p 126.*

<sup>138</sup> Robert Brandom, *Rorty and His Critics, 2000, p 137.*

‘linguistic turn’ towards a ‘pictorial turn’. Thus Derrida changed his direction from language to images. In that time he invoked imagination, echoing the phonemes, and fantasy as graphemes. “He is also said to have renewed the traditional disciplines such as aesthetic, iconology and art history and the emergence of new formations such as visual culture, and the study of media, as well as its equally important *immateriality*- that renders all things or objects – all ‘beings’ in other words – uncanny”<sup>139</sup>.

Some topics which Derrida discussed during this period are as follows:

Political sovereignty, rogue states and democracy, animal rights, law and justice, the University, television, the idea of Europe, Secularism, hospitality, religion, violence, capital punishment, and terrorism.

Derrida in his work *‘Rogues’: Two Essays on Reason (French: voyous)* comprises two major lectures which Derrida delivered in 2002 investigating the foundations of the sovereignty of the nation-state. According to Derrida sovereignty is not only the modern system of states nor international component; rather it is about laws, ethics, and human relations. It is defined by human’s capacity and he or she has the right to suspend the law. For example, in the U.S, sovereignty is manifested in the right of the President. Thus, in this context, sovereignty is linked with the use of force. Deconstruction tries to demonstrate the non-democratical features about sovereignty. “The idea of a sovereign is contradictory (one over many), the concept of exception (being above the law), the notion of the death penalty (contravening the right to life of the citizen), and..... only small states ever see their sovereignty contested and disputed by powerful states, even when it is in the name of universal principles. Not only would these powerful states never allow their own sovereignty to be challenged”<sup>140</sup>. Derrida mentioned that one could not ignore the sovereign self, its equality, liberty, power and responsibility more than the sovereign nation’s state. In this text, he extends the meaning of sovereignty to the ruler, God, reason, people, nationstate, subject, University and the asylum city.

Rorty was an anti-metaphysician and interested to deconstruct the Western metaphysical tradition. The different perspective of J. Derrida and R. Rorty is: Derrida goes towards a radical position which exists in the practice of constructing the world and social order. His

---

<sup>139</sup> W.J.T Mitchell, *Critical Inquiry*, Volume-33, number-2, “Picturing Terror: Derrida’s Autoimmunity”, 2007, p 279. As quoted in Devadason. P. (Parol).

<sup>140</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Inventions and Interviews 1971-2001, 2002*, p 384-385.

aim was to question all modes of settled practices and through the existing political and social practices he tried to open up a new avenue. On the other hand, R. Rorty drifts towards a critical reconstruction of a liberal community. His goal was to accomplish a liberal community. This community includes the specificity, sensitivity, and the greatest possible plurality to identify with others. But according to Rorty, the problem of Derrida was that he was only interested to unfold the narratives of Western philosophy. Rorty remarked that linguistic philosophy undermines the whole epistemological project. They show that from the effort to interpret the central claims of epistemology the nature of contradictions are emerged. Thus philosophers who wanted to revive the tradition they not only misreading the multiplied evidence of past failure but also the sign of a new, when it is more worth.

Their thought about metaphysical circle of reason was same but in two different directions. Rorty carries out 'critique of metaphysics' to extent that "it does not go to serve the interests of the community"<sup>141</sup> On the other side Derrida carries it to brings out the claim of any discourse. They have been oftentimes condemned by traditional philosophers. The similarity between Derrida and Rorty was that, they both refused Habermas's claim that there was necessary link exists between universalism, rationalism and modern democracy. They deny 'Reason' (an Archimedean point) which "could guarantee the possibility of a mode of argumentation that would have transcended its particular conditions of enunciation"<sup>142</sup>. Their disagreement with Habermas was theoretical. For them, though Habermas engaged with democratic politics but democracy does not need any philosophical foundation.

Thus it can be said that J. Derrida and R. Rorty they both are at the centre of controversies and they both belongs to a non-foundationalist theory of democracy. Although their perspectives are different but their work completely undermine the dominant Rationalist's approach. Though their way of thought was different but their contribution in re-interpretations and critique set a particular tone in philosophy.

#### Jean-Baudrillard:

Baudrillard ( French sociologist and cultural theorist) was another postmodern thinker, who explained that postmodern society have moved away from being which was based on the production of things but moved towards being based on the images of things. Baudrillard called these copies of things *simulacra*. For him, the difference between real life and

---

<sup>141</sup> *Critical Polemics- II: Postmodernism's Inner Subversions: Rorty and Derrida in Crossing*, p 274.

<sup>142</sup> *Chantal Mouffe, Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, 1996, p 1.

*simulacrum* in postmodern society has been reduced. Therefore it becomes difficult to differentiate one from the other. This state-of-affairs are known as *hyperreality*, where simulation or images of things are considered as more real than the reality. His introduction of *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* was a significant movement. It throws lights on the relation between reporting and hyperreality. For example, CNN – the news channel, where a group of reporters presents a live report in the Gulf to know what was happening. This was discovered, and they themselves were watching the channel CNN to find out it. Thus it shows by news how news is generated and so the source of news is the news itself. He said that “the media promotes the war, the war promotes the media, and advertising competes with the war. Promotion is the most thick-skinned parasite in our culture..... it allows us to turn the world and the violence of the world into a consumable substance”<sup>143</sup>. In short what he trying to explain that news produced the reality of the war, and media generates more advertisements for channels.

Thus following his path, in this new age, we do not buy what we actually need or what satisfied our need but we buy the brands, lifestyle identities and images. So, our desire is never satisfied by any particular purchase and according to him, this is the moving forces of the society of postmodern.

Through the above story now we can summarize the contemporary French theory as follows:

M. Foucault delivered a speech in a seminar where Derrida was present and on the basis of that speech Derrida writes a paper called *Cogito and The History of Madness (1963)*. In this paper, he criticized M. Foucault’s interpretation of Descartes. Thus this paper creates a rupture between Foucault and Derrida. After that paper, *Violence and Metaphysics* was in a leading position. Here in one side, we see Derrida’s sympathy for Levinas’s thought of alteration and on the other side, he goes away from Levinas’s thought. This book opens up their lifetime friendship.

About Deconstruction, Derrida gives many definitions but there are three definitions which are classical. In the preface of *Dissemination*, he mentioned that deconstruction consists of two phases. The first phase attacked the belief that existence is structured in terms of opposition, which are hierarchical by reversing the Platonistic hierarchies. In the second

---

<sup>143</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, 1995, p 31.

phase, Derrida discussed about reversal – reduction of Platonism. Here he tried to return to the idea that every experience or appearance was temporal. He said that in the experience of present, there is always a very small difference between the moment of newness, the past, and the future.

Derrida's second definition about deconstruction was more political and less metaphysical. In *Force of Law (1989-1990)* Derrida mentioned that deconstruction was practiced in two styles; which are not corresponding to the two phases. On the one side, there was the genealogical style which recalls the history of a theme or concept but now the issue is history of justice. There was the structural or formalistic style and that style examined a historical aporias or paradoxes.

Firstly, the *épochè* of the rule: In ethical or political thought our common axiom is to exercise justice. One must be responsible and free for one's decisions and action. Here Derrida asked a question that what freedom is. For him, it consists in a rule but in the case of justice, a judgement which followed the law was only right. Because the law must be suspended or destroyed and conserved (*épochè*), thus every case is other and each decision is different. Therefore these decisions are required an absolutely unique interpretation.

Secondly, the ghost of the undecidable: It is a decision which starts with the initiative to read, calculate, and interpret. According to Derrida, 'undecidable' is not a movement between two significations; rather "it is the experience of which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obligated – it is of obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, which taking account of law and rules"<sup>144</sup>. Derrida said that "a decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process"<sup>145</sup>.

The third aporia was the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge: The word 'horizon' suggests both the opening and limit which defines a period or infinite progress of writing.

When Derrida starts his career as a writer, structuralism was very popular. They first received a comprehensive attention with Claude Levi-Strauss (an anthropologist), and affected the

---

<sup>144</sup> Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson, *Deconstruction and the possibility of Justice*, 1992, p 24-26.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

thinking of Jacques Lacan (a psychoanalyst). Then they applied their thought to many different texts. It was about some formalities of how texts mean; rather than what they mean. According to Derridean structuralism words have meaning in relation to others. He mentioned that meanings and truths are never timeless and absolute. Derrida argued that in reality whatever we see is through sign and this is writing. Though in Derrida's work the sign reduced more than a legible but it was indistinct tools. Further, there was something hiding behind the present in the sign and here he brings the concept of deconstruction. For Derrida, through deconstruction texts are always open a new critical discovery. It rejects the idea which has a basic and single meaning. Therefore they believe that there is no reason but reasons.

Some postmodernist thinkers before Derrida such as; Lyotard and Baudrillard engaged with a war against the Marxism (the father of foundational universalistic theories). In society Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault, and Derrida they all tried to find out the truth about reality. They all reject the foundational theories or logocentrism. There was a hearted condemnation of metanarratives and grand theories but in postmodernity, Derrida gives a new turn. Therefore, through his new thought poststructuralism came. He developed his own poststructuralist blend of philosophy, literary analysis, and linguistic which was known as deconstruction.

The first half of *Writing and Difference* includes the essay on Descartes and Foucault. The second half contained his compelling analysis about how and why metaphysical thinking excludes writing from its conception of language. This book reveals the unacknowledged program which makes thought itself possible. Through these analyses Derrida focused on a new way of reading, thinking, and writing. It was the most rigorous and complete understanding of the old ways. Students and scholars find this book as an excellent introduction to the challenging of Contemporary French thinkers. The reason behind this, Derrida questions thought as we know it. So, we recognize that these debates between Derrida and post-structuralists' thoughts are fascinating which encouraged reading more on this.

.....