

INTRODUCTION

The present work is an attempt to introduce a challenging philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) who is famous for his deconstructive strategy; while dealing with the strategy, this thesis tries to explore the deconstructive methodology too. Generally, methods are understood as a way or road to obtain knowledge. The method is an instrument or an instrumental approach for representing a given field e.g., in philosophy, or in science from the outside. “That is, it is on the side of the subject and is an external reflection of the object. It is an instrumental approach to knowledge from an entirely subjective position. Yet such a relation of scientific representation as a form exterior to a given content is in principle extraneous to any thinking philosophy”¹. According to Hegel, methodological thought not to be replaced “by the non-method of presentiment and inspiration, or by the arbitrariness of prophetic utterance, both of which despise not only scientific pomposity, but scientific procedure of all kinds.”² But for Derrida, his philosophical inquiry takes the standard rules of philosophy very seriously and his method was not characterized by any exteriority to its object. Now the question is how deconstruction is originated and when?

There is no perfect solution to this question. But when Derrida writes *Letter to his Japanese Friend* he said:

“What deconstruction is not? Everything of course!
What is deconstruction? Nothing of course”³

The word deconstruction is a translation of the French word *Destruction* or *Abbau*, which has both a mechanical and grammatical meaning. It means both disassemble a machine and transport it elsewhere and to disarrange the construction of words in a sentence. It cannot be reduced to a mechanical or semantic model, the term deconstruction “itself questions the architecture of such models, as well as the model of architecture.”⁴ Indeed it is associated with post-structuralism but it has their contextual root which is related to structuralism.

¹ Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of The Mirror*, 1986, p 121.

² G.W.F Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1998, p 29.

³ David Wood & Robert Bernasconi, *Derrida and Différance*, 1985, p 5
[Chapter- Letter to a Japanese Friend]

⁴ Martin McQuillan, *Deconstruction: A Reader*, 2000, p 1.

Deconstruction is concerned with a certain idea of structure like structuralism. It tried to de-sediment or *undo* all kinds of a structure including the structure of structuralism. Derridean term deconstruction places all western philosophical term under erasure. It has been called negative theology although it is incompatible with all theologies. Derrida claims that literary critics do it, psychoanalysts, architects even poets do it, philosophers do it, painters do it and texts do it to themselves. However, there are lots of criticisms about this but one of the key themes of deconstruction is undoing such transcendental apparatus.

When Derrida moved to France the important stage of his life was started. He developed his interest in Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Blanchot through the influence of Sartre and next he developed his interest in more literary writers such as Georges Bataille, James Joyce, and Francis Ponge. Derrida was an anti-essentialist. It does not mean that he is against essence rather he is against essentialism. Actually, it is the problem of words. He claimed that any thought or word about something which started with 'ism' means that in anti-essentialism there is a certain antiism which tried to get us away from ethics. Derrida was ephemeral and silent about absolute truth, the question about origin, end, and God in his all texts. According to Derrida, "the point of writing cannot be to write the perfect text in which the absolute will not hide its face again. Rather, the point is that writing means to be engaged in it as an infinite process. Writing about the absolute, then, can never, must never, come to an end!"⁵ He never avoids the absolute absolutely. That is why his works strike people to find "a liberating way to think the absolute that will not result in the proliferation of structure."⁶ Another way we can say that there is something a good way to think well and he tried to find out what that way.

Derrida was not interested about a moral theory and the question of values vs. Social norms, virtue vs. Duty and other issues which belongs to the area of ethics. He treated these issues in a different way. For him, it is not an inquiry into the problem of what is right and wrong but it is an inquiry into the problem of the ethical constitutedness of human beings. His theory of deconstruction is a literary criticism which questions traditional assumption about identity, absolute truth, and certainty.

⁵ Martin C. Srajek, *In The Margins of Deconstruction*, 1998, p 6

⁶ *Ibid*, p 1.

Before we start the discussion about Derrida's new theme 'deconstruction', it is important to point out the postmodern turn. Here the question arises, is there any difference between modernism and postmodernism?

In the second half of the 20th century, a new turn in philosophy was started. At that time there were three main schools; Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and Postmodernism. These schools dominated Continental Philosophy. Structuralism believed that all human activities are constructed, they are not natural and everything operates only through the language system. It has had an intense effect on sociology, linguistics anthropology and other fields in addition to philosophy. According to structuralism all human activity even perception and thought itself are constructed not natural. There are four main common ideas; such as: (i) every system has a structure, (ii) the structure is what determines the position of each element, (iii) 'structural laws' deals with coexistence rather than changes and (iv) structures are 'real things'. The great figure in the philosophy of structuralism was Swiss linguistic and theorist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). He developed science of signs based on linguistics, which he calls Semiotics or Semiology. For him, any language is a complex system of signs. He concluded that any individual sign is essentially arbitrary and there is no natural relationship between a signifier which means the word like 'Cat' and signified which means the mental concept of the actual animal. Structuralism argues that any piece of writing has no origin. According to them, 'language speaks us' rather than we speak the language. Some major structuralist philosophers are; Michel Foucault, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Jean Piaget, Roman Jakobson, Noam Chomsky, and Roland Barthes.

Post-Structuralism is a reaction to Structuralism. It is closely related to Postmodernism, although they are not synonymous. Post-structuralist's approach is a kind of textual analysis. It emerged in France during 1960s. It remains an influence in a wide set of subjects including literature, art, cultural criticism, politics, sociology and history. It is a way of understanding the world by studying the relationship between language and being. If post-structuralist's theoretical assumptions are correct, then signifieds (concepts) and signifiers (words) that we use to represent them are constantly shifting in meaning. Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes were initially structuralist but later they rejected most of the structuralist's claims, especially its notion of the fixity of the relationship between signifier and signified. The other notable post-structuralists are Gilles Deleuze, Julia Kristeva, Umberto Eco, Jean Baudrillard, and Judith Butler.

Now it's time to focus on the radical movement in philosophy, known as Postmodernism.

Postmodernism, the western contemporary and intellectual movement have affected the entire socio-cultural and political milieu of our times. The influence of postmodernism is reflected almost in every sphere of life in literary circles and in scientific movements and also in the spectrum of academic disciplines. Postmodernism questions the trust of modernity and calls for the affirmation of plurality and diversity. But this approach fails to provide a compatible alternative to reason; hence, it offers preposterous proposals. The term postmodernism is widely used to denote the number of philosophical views developed in France in the late 60s. Postmodernist argues in any objective universal meanings of words or texts or any such permanent structures that are at the foundation of human consciousness. So, it is claimed that socio-cultural structures are a burden to humanity and unless we get rid of them from our cultural discourse we can't live our lives with freedom and creativity in its fullness.

Rudolf Panwitz, a German philosopher, first used this term 'postmodernism' in 1917. After that, some Spanish writers like Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, and Frederico de Onís used this term in 1934 to refer to the backlash against literary modernism. English theologian Bernard Iddings Bell in 1939 used the term postmodernism to refer to the failures of secular modernism in the religious sphere. Later it was used by several literary critics and theologians to denote different meanings. The term is currently used in philosophy to refer to the post-structuralist philosophy of the French philosophers. They hardly believe in any universal structures or categories of thought that from the human self. According to those philosophers, cultures do not create man, rather man creates his cultures. The very legitimacy of western culture and civilization is questioned here. Actually, postmodernism expresses its radical views on different spheres of life even beyond philosophy. The student revolution of the late 60s in Europe played a crucial role in making of a postmodern sub-culture. So, it is clear that the history of postmodernism in the 70s and 80s is basically one of widespread acceptance of the ideas spread by different philosophers. This trend criticizes the notion of 'presence' or 'presentation' in knowledge and criticizes the effort of rational inquiry to examine the origin of the source of all human knowledge. Postmodernism focuses on the marginalized, the outlawed and the abnormal of society. Actually, it calls for a critical analysis of our smug complacency towards accepted norms and traditions.

However, it is difficult to define postmodernism. It is an umbrella term drawing within its fold different disciplines like philosophy, history, literary theory, and art. Postmodernism is a

movement which occurs as a reaction against the philosophical theories, values, and worldview of the modern period, roughly the period of scientific revolution from the 17th and 18th centuries till the mid-20th century. Many of the doctrines typically associated with postmodernism can be fairly described as the denial of the 18th century Enlightenment faith in human reason and in the pursuit of science and technology. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger assumed the modern philosophy to generated provocative postmodern modes of writing, discourse, and criticism. A group of French thinkers in the 1970s, associated with post-structuralism radicalized the critique of modern philosophy. They came to be labeled as postmodernist theorists. As Eagleton, an English social philosopher-cum-literary theorist has put it: “Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities.”⁷

Postmodernism denies there is an objective reality. They treat objective reality as a kind of conceptual construct. From the above, it follows that there is no such thing as absolute truth in philosophy, science or history. It questions the universal validity of reason and logic and distrusts science and technology as instruments of human progress. Hence, postmodernism is a response to the horrors of the Holocaust and the dangers of an atomic age. Many of them believe that reason and logic is oppressive as they have been used to destroy others. Postmodernism holds that there is no intrinsic human nature, it is completely socially determined. According to them, language does not represent the reality outside us; it is not a ‘mirror of the universe’. It is semantically self-contained or self-referential. The meaning of a word is a series of contrasts and differences with the meanings of other words in the system.

Postmodernism dismisses any totalizing systems of thought in man’s social, historical, biological development as a grand meta-narrative. Such grand narratives keep some social groups in power and others out of it. From Christian redemption to Marxism and the political narrative of nationalism are all ‘meta-narrative’. If there are no absolute objective truths in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, then such truths are constructed by discourses. A

⁷ Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, 1996, p preface vii.

discourse is a set of interlocking and mutually supporting statements used to define and describe a subject matter, for example: the discursive practices of law, medicine, and aesthetic and so on. Some postmodernist holds that the prevailing discourses in any society are always influenced by power relations. They reveal the interest and values of the powerful, dominant elite groups.

After all this discussion, unfortunately, it is impossible to find out a simple and uncontroversial meaning of the term postmodernism. There are so many criticisms about postmodernism. Christopher Norris mentioned that postmodernism is a period of playful freedom, a kind of consumer choice. For him, it's just an unfortunate mistake. J. F. Lyotard observes postmodernism as conditions. S. Connor sees it as a culture. For Jameson, it's a kind of cultural domination and even Eagleton see it is an illusion. American literary critic Ihab Hassan in his book *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: toward a Postmodern Literature* in 1982 introduces a list of difference between modernism and postmodernism, like:

- Modernism discusses Romanticism, form, purpose whereas postmodernism discusses pataphysics or Dadaism, Anti-form, play.
- Modernism is about logos, distance, creation or totalization whereas postmodernism is about silence, participation, deconstruction.
- In modernism, the word synthesis, presence, metaphor, metaphysics, and transcendence are used. But in postmodernism antithesis, absence, metonymy, irony, and immanence are used.

There are some categories which are highly controversial. Even Hassan says that there are some problematic points in his own categories. He argues, these categories are produced here just as a guide nothing else.

There is a more transparent way to understand both the theories, which are explained below:

The generation of modernism used rational and logical means to gain knowledge. It based on hierarchical, organized, and determinate nature of knowledge. Their approach was objective, theoretical, and even analytic. Modernist's thinking was about the search for an abstract truth of life. They had an optimistic view (believed that there are values and ethics that need to be followed). But if we see the generation of postmodernism, they denied the application of logical thinking. Here as a reaction to modernism, the thinking was based on unscientific, and irrational, whereas Postmodernism is based on an anarchical, non-totalized, and an

indeterminate state of knowledge. Their approach was subjective. According to the postmodern philosopher, there is no universal truth, abstract or otherwise.

Modern thinkers tried to construct a coherent worldview. They believe in learning from past experiences. To fully analyze the subject they believe in going deep into it. Here art and literary works were considered as unique creations of the artists, which believed to bear deep meaning in novels and books that were predominated society. In the postmodern tradition, they try to attempt to remove the difference between high and low. They believe that there is no connection between past experience and the present. In present time past experiences are irrelevant. There is no depth of subjects. They believe in going by the superficial appearances, and in playing on surfaces. Here people concentrated in deriving their own meanings from pieces of art, and literature. During the postmodern era advancements in technology, television, and computers became dominant in society. Art and literary works are copied by the means of digital media.

Before the Second World War, a philosopher who gave a powerful effect in philosophy and literature was Sartre. His first book was published in 1936 *The Transcendence of the Ego (La Transcendance de l'ego: Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique)*, Here he observed the ego as in the world but not materially of consciousness; rather he described the ego as an object for consciousness. In 1938 another book was published: *Nausea (La Nausée)*, which grants consciousness as remarkable independence and it gives reality the full weight of its sense. For a few years, these two books create some remarkable effect on the world. However this discussion is not something new in French thought and literature, but it makes Sartre's thought very special and practical. In Western philosophy, it was a new way of thought where Hegel a great philosopher who even can't reach in that point. And that might be the reason for comparing him to some Indian Buddhist philosopher. Although in 1945 Sartre considered himself as a hermeneutic and again in 1947 it was observed that in his book *SituationsII: What is Literature?(Qu'est-ce que la littérature?)*, he was trying to show his interest in Marxism. But still, Sartre's theory was in success. During that time many philosophers were interested in him, among them, two philosophers play an important role: one is Roland Barthes and another is Jacques Derrida. Thus, the impact of Sartre in the case of Derrida was very much critical. For this reason his followers do not mention Sartre's name into their discussion. In the present work, the main discussion is about Jacques Derrida and his theme deconstruction, which will be discussed critically in the next chapters.

Postmodernism is a kind of response to modernism. People consider them as two aspects of the same movements. If we see the social side of society, we realize that modernization is bringing a massive amount of change in social society; it transformed modern western society to postmodern society. In that time the workers of social thinkers are the products of their social and political contexts. Here the word 'contexts' are not used as universal rather they could be broader or narrow. Two types of social society are mentioned here one is Indian society and another is western. We find the difference between Indian and Western sociology due to social and historical conditions. Indian sociological theory bears a deep imprint of these historical forces. G.S Ghurye and N.K Bose are the pioneers of the Indian sociology are strongly influenced by functional theorists. Indian sociology believes in feudalism, colonialism, and exploitation. But if we see the western side, they were democracy, industrialism, capitalism, and modernization; although not all thinkers supported the growth of capitalism as a good thing like Karl Marx. For him "the theoretical arguments included the exploitative, oppressive nature of capitalism, the meaningless nature of work in the capitalist world, the importance of economic classes in world history, the expansion of capitalism to worldwide oppression, or imperialism, and the expected eventual revolution of the world's working classes against the capitalist's owners"⁸. "Instead of resulting in a functioning organism, the division of labour resulted in alienation. Ideologically, the first- and second-generation radical anti-capitalists argued that explanation and understanding must have changed their goal. They, too, were optimists, convinced that the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism was not only needed but inevitable."⁹ But when functionalism became as a trustworthy method in 1930, many theorist and ideologies remarks that Marxism is dead. In that time Francis Fukuyama in his thesis stated that 'there is the end of history'. Perhaps, in India postmodernism can be traced not only in architecture, literature; but it may be traced in Hindi films also.

Though in philosophy, the movement of postmodernism and in particular post-structuralism was geared by Jacques Derrida, but here it may be mentioned that Derrida was a postmodernist or even post-structuralist philosopher. It is because; he never addressed himself as either postmodernist or post-structuralist. "Whether or not Derrida would accept that he is a postmodern account, it is certainly the case that his concept of deconstruction has

⁸ *Jean Baudrillard: Biography, writings and Intellectual Orientation of Baudrillard.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

entered the canon forgive me! – of postmodern critique”¹⁰. But Derrida was post-structuralist when he related to Ferdinand de Saussure, Levi Strauss, and Michel Foucault, which we will discuss later. Barry Stocker claimed that “Derrida is not just reacting to structuralism, and his real starting point is in philosophical phenomenology, and he certainly never talked about post-structuralism”¹¹. Therefore it may be commented that his theory of deconstruction leads to postmodern thought.

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¹⁰ David Lyon, *Post Modernity: Concepts in Social Thought*, 2002, p 18.

¹¹ Barry Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction*, 2006, p 15.