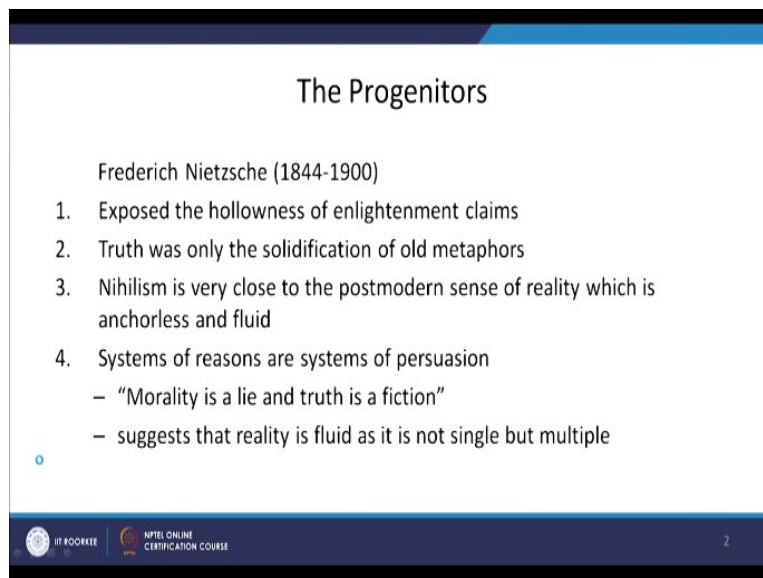


Literature, Culture and Media
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Indian Institute of Technology – Roorkee

Lecture - 12
Modernism and Postmodernism II

Dear participants, welcome to the second module of this week. In the first module, we had discussed the intellectual background of the development of modernism and postmodernism. We had also viewed who were the main philosophers who had shaped and impacted the postmodernist philosophy. Today, I would begin with the discussion of the progenitors. The philosophical influences who had made it possible for the contemporary thinkers to envisage postmodernity as a philosophy.

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The Progenitors

Frederich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

1. Exposed the hollowness of enlightenment claims
2. Truth was only the solidification of old metaphors
3. Nihilism is very close to the postmodern sense of reality which is anchorless and fluid
4. Systems of reasons are systems of persuasion
 - “Morality is a lie and truth is a fiction”
 - suggests that reality is fluid as it is not single but multiple

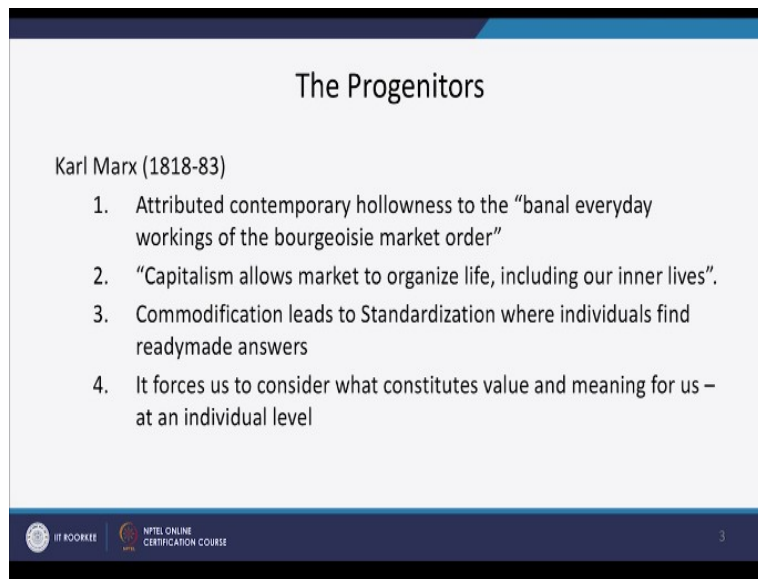
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The first major influence is of course Frederich Nietzsche. Frederich Nietzsche had exposed the hollowness of enlightenment claims and he had constantly grappled with the supremacy of contemporary reason. He had said that truth was only the solidification of old metaphors and it is this idea which comes very close to the postmodernist rejection of metanarratives.

Nietzsche’s ideas which were labeled as nihilist philosophy were also very close to the postmodernist sense of reality which is also fluid and anchorless. Certain quotes from Nietzsche are very contemporary sounding. We feel as if it is a very contemporary philosopher who is naming them. For example, “morality is a lie and truth is a fiction”. His

statement that “God is dead” is also something which is very postmodernist in its approach because this suggest that reality is fluid and at the same time it is not single but multiple.

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The slide is titled "The Progenitors" and lists Karl Marx (1818-83) with four points:

1. Attributed contemporary hollowness to the “banal everyday workings of the bourgeoisie market order”
2. “Capitalism allows market to organize life, including our inner lives”.
3. Commodification leads to Standardization where individuals find readymade answers
4. It forces us to consider what constitutes value and meaning for us – at an individual level

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Another significant influence was that of Karl Marx. If you look at the timeline, we find that Karl Marx had worked before Frederich Nietzsche but even though he was earlier than Nietzsche, he had talked about if I can put it like more mundane things whereas Nietzsche was talking about metaphysical things, Karl Marx was talking about well say money. Now what Nietzsche has termed as a philosophical and metaphysical approach towards things,

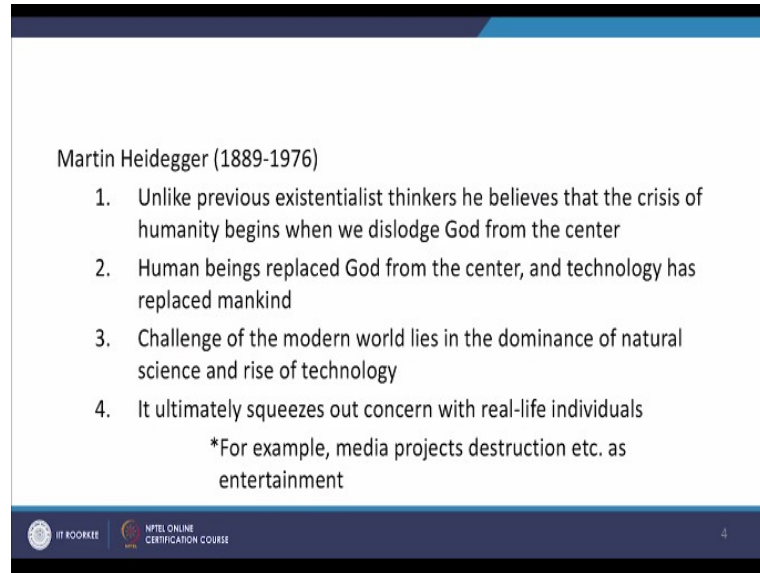
Karl Marx had conditioned the same things in terms of money. He attributed contemporary hollowness to the banal everyday workings of the bourgeoisie market order. He had also said that the capitalist forces allow the market forces to organize the life of the individual and the life of the community also. Karl Marx was the first philosopher to claim that it is the market forces we conditioned the inner life and the thought processes of the individuals also.

He has talked about commodification which leads to standardization where individuals find readymade answers instead of thinking about the solutions. D. H. Lawrence had also commented in one of his essays that a 16-year-old girl knows everything about falling in love. Lawrence had said that a girl already knows how should she respond to other people if she has to portray that she has fall in love.

So she has learnt all the responses, all the phrases, every possible nuance of emotion from media. She does not have to think about it. So the responses are not genuine according to the

Marxist philosophy, according to the Lawrence' philosophy also for that matter and they say that the emotional responses of individuals are available in a readymade fashion. It forces us to consider what constitutes value and meaning for us at an individual level.

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Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

1. Unlike previous existentialist thinkers he believes that the crisis of humanity begins when we dislodge God from the center
2. Human beings replaced God from the center, and technology has replaced mankind
3. Challenge of the modern world lies in the dominance of natural science and rise of technology
4. It ultimately squeezes out concern with real-life individuals

*For example, media projects destruction etc. as entertainment

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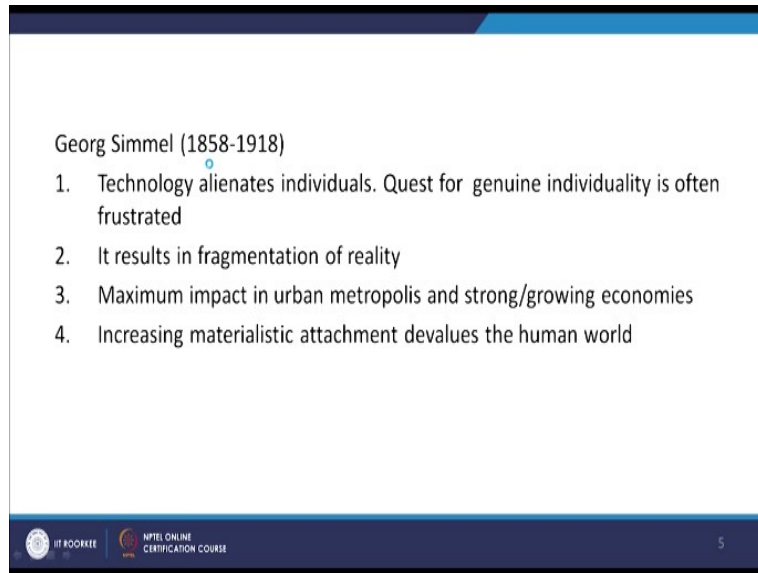
The third person who is very important for the development of the postmodernist philosophy is Martin Heidegger. Though Heidegger often comes across as an existentialist philosopher who believes staunchly in the existence of God, still we find that several threats of his arguments are very close to the postmodernist arguments. Unlike previous existentialist thinkers he believes that the crisis of humanity begins when we dislodge God from the center.

Remember that he is a staunch theist, a staunch believer. He says that in the modern civilization, human beings have replaced God from the center and then now in the 20th century, technology has started to displace human beings from the center. So in the center of the things where God should have been, we put the mankind first and then we are putting the technology.

So the challenge of the modern world lies in the dominance of natural science and rise of technology. According to Heidegger, the rise of technology if it is not contained ultimately squeezes out concern with real life individuals. For example, the media projection of war and destruction as a prime time news which become a source of entertainment than concern. Another philosopher is George Simmel who has talked a lot about the alienation which technology brings about in individual.

He says that the quest for genuine individuality is often frustrated in this world which is dominated by technology and he also says that the dominance of technology results in the fragmentation of reality.

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Georg Simmel (1858-1918)

1. Technology alienates individuals. Quest for genuine individuality is often frustrated
2. It results in fragmentation of reality
3. Maximum impact in urban metropolis and strong/growing economies
4. Increasing materialistic attachment devalues the human world

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Simmel has argued that the maximum impact of contemporary forces of technology as well as the economic forces can be seen in the urban metropolis and those economies which are already either is strong or growing sturdily. So he says that the quality of life in such places becomes dehumanizing. He also says that the increasing materialistic attachment that is attachment to the external things devalues the human world.

The influence of George Simmel on the development of the postmodernist philosophy is indirect but at the same time, it is a very strong influence.

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• Multiplicity of reality, Metanarratives, Flux and withdrawal

• Contemporary Thinkers:
Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard

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They have talked about the multiplicity of realities, metanarratives, the flux and the withdrawal of the individual from the real life situations whereas these philosophers have been major influences on the development of the postmodernist philosophy. We find that the role of the contemporary thinkers is also equally important. For example, Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida.

We will also talk about these philosophers in the course of this week. After having discussed the philosophical background of postmodernist theory, how it is different from modernism and also after having traced the climate of knowledge and traditions of learning which have made this development possible, let us now discuss the key characteristics of postmodernism. These key characteristics are discussed in a journalistic fashion.

We find that these characteristics are valid not only for literary theories and literary studies but they are also equally valid for understanding the concept of postmodernism from a sociological point of view.

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Key Characteristics of Post-Modernism

1. Authority of sciences and knowledge is not unquestioned anymore.
 - Growing specializations
 - Diversification means that no single person can know any discipline completely
 - Social/cultural influences on how a scientific fact is perceived and interpreted is growing
 - Policy decisions are being often dictated by the local preferences

The first most significant aspect which we come to understand is that the authority of sciences and knowledge is not unquestioned anymore. There was a time in modernity when the authority of science and knowledge was unquestioned. There were strong binaries, correct and incorrect, right and wrong but we find that this authority is not unquestioned anymore. Postmodernist starts questioning the binaries and the authorities also.

And there are valid reasons to it also, for example the growing specializations. The growing specializations initially were welcome because they told us that there is progress but we find that now there are sub-dimensions into every specialization and this diversification also means that a person cannot know any discipline completely whereas it is good but at the same time it can also create confusion in the individual psyche.

At the same time, we find that when this authority of sciences and knowledge is being questioned continually, these influences of social and cultural norms also influence our understanding of a scientific fact. How do we perceive and interpret a scientific fact is also conditioned by the social influences and the cultural influences and at the same time, we find that the policy decisions are often being dictated by the local preferences.

So the sciences do not have a singular authoritative voice. They are being challenged by the parallel truths. The semi-scientific investigations locally sometimes can also be operated by media as being truly scientific as the binaries are not there.

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2. Emphasis now is on interpretation and performativity, not on the production of knowledge

- Immediacy of solutions
- Computer printouts are often trusted as unquestioned reliable data

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The emphasis now is on interpretation and performativity and not on the production of knowledge. We look for immediacy of solution instead of spending time too much in understanding a particular phenomena. So the postmodernist behaviour has abated the tendency to look for immediacy in everything, immediacy in terms of the appeasement of our desires, immediacy in terms of knowledge, immediacy in terms of our understandings also.

So therefore in our climate we find that the computer printouts are often trusted as unquestioned reliable data.

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3. Resurgence of Liberal Capitalism

- With the collapse of communism as an ideology and as a political system, society is once again moving towards the liberal version of capitalism
- Marxism has forever lost its claim to universality
- World order is shrinking in cultural ways – more uniform in cultural preferences (Cold War and Bi-Polar World ending)

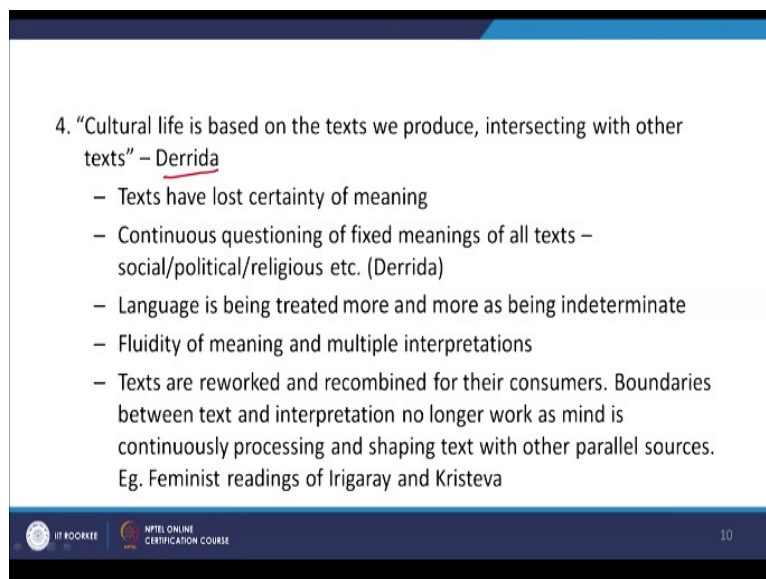
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The third significant characteristic of postmodernist behaviour is the resurgence of liberal capitalism. We have already noticed that the collapse of communism has resulted in a particular type of ideology negation. The states had been freed and collapse of communism as

an ideology and as a political forceful system once again gave rise to a liberal version of capitalism.

We also know that with the fall of the communism, Marxist was also forever lost its claim to universality. The world order is shrinking in cultural ways, for example the bipolar world is not a reality anymore. The days of the Cold War are also over, so the world is becoming more uniform in cultural preferences. There is universality in culture, so the world order is shrinking as far as our cultural understanding is concerned.

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4. "Cultural life is based on the texts we produce, intersecting with other texts" – Derrida

- Texts have lost certainty of meaning
- Continuous questioning of fixed meanings of all texts – social/political/religious etc. (Derrida)
- Language is being treated more and more as being indeterminate
- Fluidity of meaning and multiple interpretations
- Texts are reworked and recombined for their consumers. Boundaries between text and interpretation no longer work as mind is continuously processing and shaping text with other parallel sources. Eg. Feminist readings of Irigaray and Kristeva

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A very significant way of understanding the postmodern world is to understand the concepts of Derrida. Derrida has talked about deconstruction and is primarily known in cultural and literary fields for that. So he had said that our cultural life is based on the texts we produce intersecting with each other texts but he also says that now the texts have lost the certainty. We keep on continuously questioning the fixed meanings of all text.

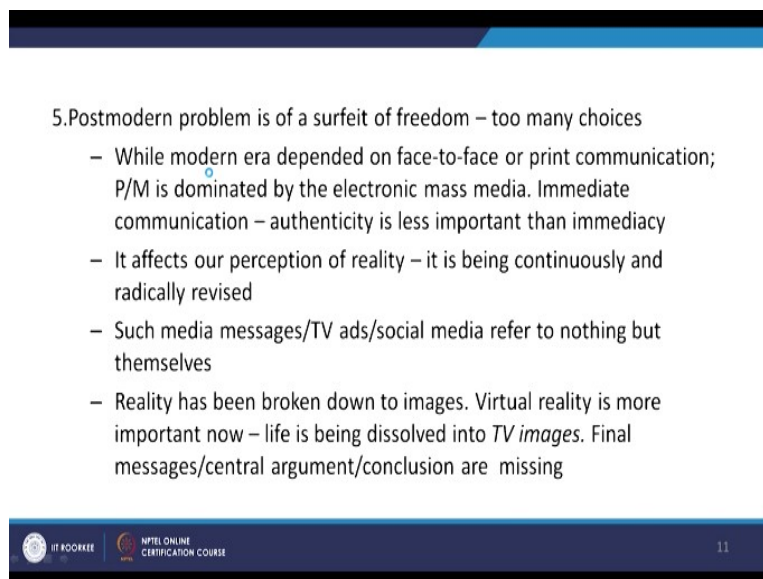
And deconstruction is about replacing the primary meaning and to look for the presence of an alternate reading which is possible in a text. So sociopolitical and religious texts are being read again, the previous meanings are being deconstructed and new meanings are being searched for. At the same time, we know that language is being treated more and more as being indeterminate.

There is a fluidity of meaning and multiple interpretations as the unquestioned relationship between the signifier and the signified is no longer there. So texts are reworked and

recombined for their consumers. The texts are being continually translated into other mediums also. For example, the relationship between the text and the films and other aspects of media has become very strong in the postmodernist world.

Boundaries between text and interpretation no longer work as mind is continually processing and shaping text with other parallel sources. For example, we can refer to the feminist readings of Irigaray and Julia Kristeva in this direction.

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5. Postmodern problem is of a surfeit of freedom – too many choices

- While modern era depended on face-to-face or print communication; P/M is dominated by the electronic mass media. Immediate communication – authenticity is less important than immediacy
- It affects our perception of reality – it is being continuously and radically revised
- Such media messages/TV ads/social media refer to nothing but themselves
- Reality has been broken down to images. Virtual reality is more important now – life is being dissolved into *TV images*. Final messages/central argument/conclusion are missing

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Another aspect which is significant to understand the postmodernist philosophy is that the postmodern problem is of a surfeit of too many choices. We can look at several instances of that to understand that. While modern era depended on face-to-face communication or to the medium of print. Postmodernism is dominated by the electronic mass media. Immediate communication has become more important, the breaking news for example.

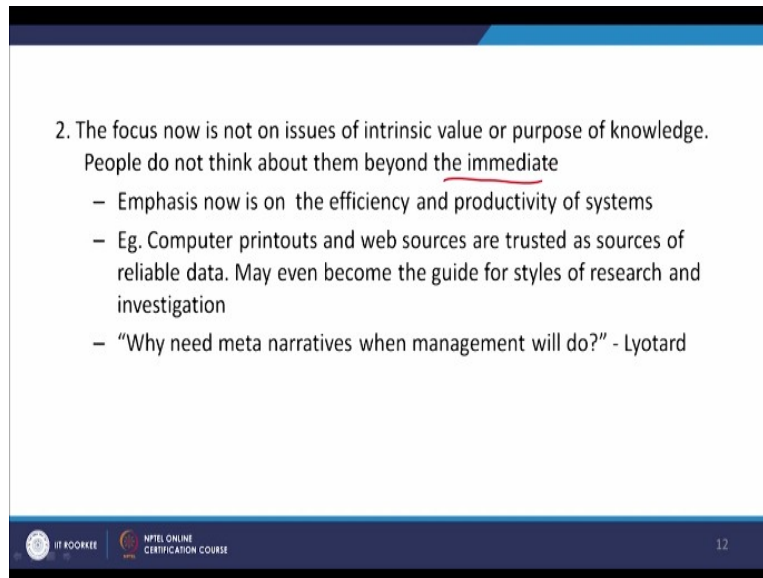
Authenticity is less important than immediacy. Now when we put more emphasis on immediacy of communication and we do not pay much attention to the authenticity value of it, we find that our perception of reality is also affected. It is being continuously and radically revised because we do not go deeper into the authentic understanding of a message, we look for the latest one, we look for the immediate transfer of a particular message.

And therefore, we find that in this world, this media messages for example the news on the TV, the TV ads and the social media refer to nothing but themselves. So reality ultimately today in the postmodern world has been broken down to images. Virtual reality is more

important now. Life is being dissolved into TV images and final messages the central argument of things, the conclusion, the authenticity of things is missing.

But this is how the postmodern world looks at the scenario. The authenticity and the reason over the significant points of a modernist approach. In the postmodern world, we find that they have been surrendered to an immediacy of affairs.

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2. The focus now is not on issues of intrinsic value or purpose of knowledge. People do not think about them beyond the immediate

- Emphasis now is on the efficiency and productivity of systems
- Eg. Computer printouts and web sources are trusted as sources of reliable data. May even become the guide for styles of research and investigation
- “Why need meta narratives when management will do?” - Lyotard

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The focus now is not on issues of intrinsic value or purpose of knowledge. People do not think beyond the immediate. So it is the immediate which has become much more important. Knowledge for itself does not have any intrinsic value, so the systems emphasize now on the efficiency and productivity. For example, I have already referred to the computer printouts and web sources which are trusted more as sources of reliable data.

So sometimes we find that they may even become the guide for styles of research and investigation. Lyotard has raised a very significant point when he says that “why need metanarratives when management will do?” So we find that the intrinsic value or purpose of knowledge has been replaced by the immediacy of things.

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Summing Up!

- Postmodernism, in its denial of an objective truth or reality, comes close to constructivism—the anti-essentialist argument that everything is ideologically constructed.
- Constructivism invariably leads to relativism. Our identities are constructed and transformed every moment in relation to our social environment. Therefore there is scope for multiple and diverse identities, multiple truths, moral codes and views of reality.

The postmodernism in its denial of an objective truth or reality, comes very close to constructivism, the anti-essentialist argument that everything is ideologically constructed. Constructivism invariably leads to relativism. Our identities are constructed and transformed every moment in relation to our social environment and therefore there is a scope for multiple and diverse identities, multiple truths, moral codes and views of reality.

So multiplicity in everything is what postmodernist basically talks about. It also finds that the media constructs and shapes our identity. It is a very palpable truth of the postmodernist philosophy that we are governed by the impact of media now.

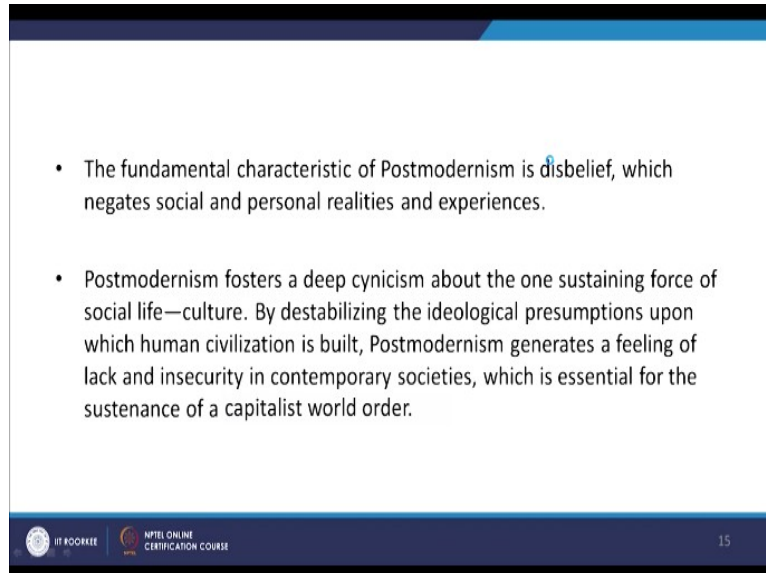
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- Postmodernism promulgates that media constructs and shapes identity.
- Postmodernism developed as a response to the contemporary boom in electronics and communications technologies and its revolutionizing of our old world order.
- Emphasizes subjectivity which is always plural and provisional. It is also linked with the local and the specific.
- Postmodernism relies on the method of Deconstruction to analyze socio-cultural situations.

So postmodernism has developed as a response to the contemporary boom in electronics and communication technologies and is revolutionizing of our old world order. It also emphasizes

objectivity and subjectivity is always plural and provisional. It is also linked with the local and the specific because the individuality is related with the local and the specific. Postmodernism relies on the method of deconstruction to analyze socio-cultural situations.

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- The fundamental characteristic of Postmodernism is disbelief, which negates social and personal realities and experiences.
- Postmodernism fosters a deep cynicism about the one sustaining force of social life—culture. By destabilizing the ideological presumptions upon which human civilization is built, Postmodernism generates a feeling of lack and insecurity in contemporary societies, which is essential for the sustenance of a capitalist world order.

The fundamental characteristics of postmodernism is disbelief which negates social and personal realities and experiences. Postmodernism also fosters a deep cynicism about the single sustaining force of social life and that is culture. It has destabilized the ideological presumptions upon which human civilization has been built. Postmodernism generates a feeling of lack and insecurity in contemporary societies, which is essential for the sustenance of a capitalistic world order. Thank you.