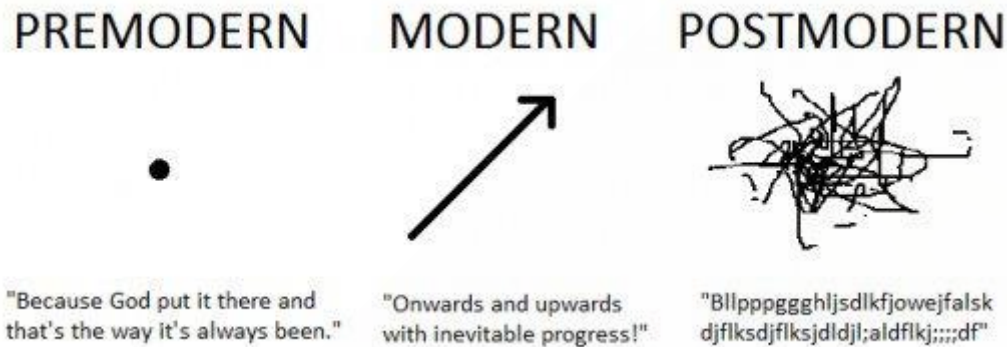


POST-MODERNISM

Post modernism is seen as kind of intellectual movement with the purpose of challenging stage of modernism prevalent in 19th century.' Postmodernity generally refers to a period beginning in the 1980s (sometimes also referred to as late capitalism) in which radical changes in technology, economics, politics, architecture, and popular culture signified a shift in society—a movement away from modernity. Some thinkers, including Daniel Bell, have denoted this period as a time of post-industrialism. Massive changes in the nature of economics (e.g., the movement toward multinational corporations), transformations in government, alterations in technology and information systems, the development of a media-based society, and changes in consumerism can all be attributed to this epochal shift that has been labelled postmodernity.



Modernism- A background to understand Post-Modernism

Modernity came with renaissance. Over the centuries, science, technology and human reason became most important with extreme authority. Modernism is a movement that is philosophical and artistic in nature. The very term find its origin in the Western context that relates with the cultural and social changes due to revolutions and alterations in the western civilization.

Modernism was like a philosophy that stressed on a particular 'way of thinking', a new and progressive outlook towards society that was made by breaking shackles of orthodoxy and traditions that were irrational in nature. 'Self-consciousness' was considered the main characteristic of this movement.

The main aim of modernism was 'progress'. It facilitated a new attitude towards life that was more rational.

Modernity, Modernism and Modernisation

These terms are interlinked. They came into being during the renaissance. Madan Sarup in *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, defines Modernity as "the progressive economic and administrative rationalisation and differentiation of the social world" (1993). Modernism was defined as "an aesthetic development which brought about a radical shift in consciousness and a violent transformation of social conditions in the late 19th and 20th centuries."

The period when modernity and modernism were studied was started with new changes in society. The transition was seen in political and economic spheres where the change was from feudalism to industrialism. **Religion got a back seat with the rise of the enlightenment movement. Urbanisation also took place.** All these realities and more led scholars to theorise. **This is the period which is termed as modernisation that also marks the advent of positivism and scientific thinking.** The designation of anthropology as a science was because of modernist thinking that prioritised rationality.

From modernity to post-modernity

Modern age

- production
- Community life
- Social class
- Family
- A belief in continuity and situation
- A role of education
- A one-way media
- Overt social control
- Nationhood
- Science aided progress and finding the truth

Structure/security/place/stability
YOU KNEW WHO YOU WERE

Post modern age

- consumption
- fragmentation (individualism)
- Identity from other sources
- Families (many options)
- Breakage with the past/tradition
- Education for what?
- Duality of media (choice/interchange)
- Covert control (CCTV etc)
- Global
- Science is only one source of knowledge – plurality of truths now

Confusion/lack of structure/
incessant choice
YOU CREATE WHO YOU WANT TO BE

WHAT IS POST-MODERNISM?

This is a theory which is highly debated amongst scholars. It is very difficult to define postmodernism as there is no single unifying definition of it. Post-modernism is associated with modernism. The term Post means later. Hence what came after modernism may be seen as post-modernism. It arose as a movement which contradicted the modernist idea. It started with the arts and architecture where outlooks which were based on modernism were rejected. It tried to break conventions and look for ideas beyond ordinary explanation, where self and the other, the subject and the object gets combined or dissolved. From arts and architecture, post-modernism as a theoretical deliberation entered into other spheres of study where it **questioned constructed social realities**. As in the arts, postmodernism in anthropology too **interrogates into definite ordering of life, for example, the employers and the employed, men and women, patriarchy and matriarchy and many more other such examples which we usually find to be placed normatively**. Post-modernism suggests that instead of studying these either in isolation or specific realities, it is necessary to view them as combined, plural and comparable.

In anthropology, post-modernism has been provided with many explanations by many philosophers. **Melford Spiro** says “The postmodernist critique of **science consists of two interrelated arguments, epistemological and ideological. Both are based on subjectivity. First**, because of the subjectivity of the human object, **anthropology, according to the epistemological argument cannot be a science**; and in any event the subjectivity of the human subject precludes the possibility of science discovering objective truth. **Second**, since **objectivity is an illusion, science according to the ideological argument, subverts oppressed groups, females, ethnics, third-world peoples**”.

Postmodernism asked a series of timely but difficult questions about representation in ethnographic writing: What is the basis of this ethnographic authority? What authorizes anthropologists, most of whom are privileged Westerners, to speak on behalf of other cultures? How can one know if what they write avoids the traps of essentialism and if what they say is true? For many anthropologists and

other researchers involved in empirical qualitative research, this was not a mere critique, it was a crisis in the discipline, a crisis of representation.

POST-MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNISM

While modernism as a theory in modernity associated itself with ideas like identity, authority, unanimity, inevitability etc, **post-modernism looks into difference, multiplicity, cynicism, documentation etc. Post-modernism deliberates that an objective and impartial view of a culture, which is not one's own is unattainable.**

Post-modernist anthropological investigation started in the 1960s, which noted that earlier anthropological documentation was based on social and political frameworks which were validated by objective explanation. As much as one may want to be objective in one's interpretation of other cultures, one is unable to let go of the ingrained biases. Post-modern anthropologists try to correct this situation by **trying to be sensitive and subjective** as much as possible. In other words the postmodern anthropologists attempt to scrutinise, interpret and appraise existing guidelines of anthropology and at the same time try to survey its codes, regularity and procedures of study.

Simply putting Anthropologists, if they provide their own interpretations it might be boggled by issues of power and wealth which postmodernism tries to defy. This means that they have considered the views of the culture studied and put them forth. **Post modernism does not recognise any objective truth or fact.** This for others who do not follow the postmodern theoretical path, is threatening and therefore they tend to criticise the postmodern perspective by pointing that postmodernism follows a moral model route. Moral model they insist, decry empirical and scientific data. In fact they feel that a postmodern anthropological approach does not allow a common ground of understanding. Thus, the debate today is one of whether representation of knowledge should be based on scientific or subjective and reflexive hence more humanist approach. The postmodern author involves the subjects of her study into her analysis.

CRITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANTHROPOLOGY

The influences of postmodernism on contemporary anthropology fall into three general trends.

First, it is an epistemological critique of knowledge that challenges the assumptions of West-centric, positivistic, and unproblematized forms of knowledge.

Next, it is a challenge to anthropology's methodologies (fieldwork), its view of the relationship of the anthropologist to the observed, and the connections of fieldwork to the text (ethnography).

Last, it is the explicit critique of ethnography—the nature of textuality, its politics, its disciplinary position within anthropology, issues of the specific form and modes of the text, the voice of the ethnographer, and the role of the informant within the text.

Some ethnographers of the postmodern camp, including **Renato Rosaldo**, suggested that new insights be brought to bear on the methodologies of the discipline. In "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage" (from Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis), Rosaldo presented a complex methodological interplay of the rage of **the Ilongot** he studied with his own rage and identity as he dealt with the tragic death of his wife. Rosaldo, like many other postmodernists, offered the idea that emotion, subjectivity, and the important aspect of reflexivity could, and indeed should, be a part of new methods of fieldwork.

MAJOR TENETS OF POSTMODERNISM:

- i) PM supports Globalization
- ii) Ethics is a subject matter of individual
- iii) PM supports rationality and self-subjectivity
- iv) PM did not get stuck in the categories of 'right' and 'wrong' as they are against notion of absolute truth in post modernism.
- v) Opposes any idea which claims to 'universal in nature'.
- vi) People are products of power and power is everywhere (Foucault)



Influencing Figures of Postmodernism

French philosophers like Barlett, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault etc. developed the theory. Anthropologists who were encouraged to forward this thought are Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, George Marcus, Nancy Hughes etc.

BARETT (1996)- He is a postmodernist who presented a classification of ethnographs based on how they were written with a perspective that

- i) an ethnographer should emphasize on including the opinions of the people being studied,
- ii) a sense of relativism should be developed for the practices of the other cultures,
- iii) he rejected grand universal schemes or theories that explained the other cultures.

Classification of ethnographs:

- i) **Realistic ethnographs:** these are the ethnographs that claimed to give an actual portrait of culture or society. Their way of writing is called ethnographic realism. For eg: Malinowski's ethnographs
- ii) **Interpretative ethnographs:** they describe and interpret what members of society mean by the cultural aspects. For eg: ethnographs of Geertz
- iii) **Experimental ethnographs:** They are contemporary ethnographs based on experiments involving giving hypothesis followed by testing and validation providing a final statement. Eg: Cora-du-Bois' ethnograph
- iv) **Reflexive ethnograph/dialogue ethnograph/postmodern ethnograph:** They study ethnographs and understand the underlying themes. They reflect on methods of data collection, way of interpretation of culture aspects, methods of theorizing the kind of language

used and whether the ethnographer has accommodated the views and interpretation of the natives. There is an overemphasis on linguistic aspect.

For postmodernist an ethnographic study is a momentary study of culture. They believe that cultures are non-static. Cultures influence and are influenced by several factors leading to pluralistic cultures and society. The commentaries on ethnographs are either poetry or in the prose work. They provide opportunity for the future theorists to provide a different perspective. It is an emerging school that can be described as an arm-chair anthropology in the modern times.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD (1929-2007): Baudrillard was a sociologist by training who used the postmodern perspective to explain the world as a set of models. He does so by dividing modernity and postmodernity into two parts. For him every incident in life has already taken place and the world has nothing new to offer. For Baudrillard the postmodern era started with the introduction of mass media, more specifically cinema and photography. We are **now just customers whose desire are created by media**. He defined the world to be nothing but images and images are replications. For him truth and science do not hold their real meaning. **Truth according to Baudrillard in society is what is agreed upon and science is only one mode of explanation.**

JACQUES DERRIDA (1930-2004): He popularised the **concept of deconstruction** in post-structuralism and postmodernism. **Deconstruction suggests that whatever is documented is to be critiqued or analytically reviewed, to reveal the relationship of meaning between texts.** It wants to dismantle the excessive loyalty towards an idea which leads to suppression of the opposite idea. According to **Deconstruction** nothing in this world has one and a constant meaning. Every meaning changes in different contexts. **Deconstruction is a strategy of critical questioning directed towards exposing unquestionable metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions.**

MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926-1984): For him the **truths which are considered by society as permanent, in reality changes with time.** Foucault study was basically about the politics of power and how it changes. This was in fact one of the basis of postmodernism. He questioned the facts which were placed in chronological order to describe historical events. He believed that there are hidden parts, parts which are not accounted for, in history which contain concealed knowledge. These however do play a role in giving societies identities. It is due to developing such ideas about truth and knowledge, Foucault is considered to be one of the prime postmodernists. His theory of discourse tells us that **there is no absolute truth, but truth is constructed out of people talking about it** and in this talk, there is the entire theory of power that plays itself out. **Thus, powerful voices are heard more than subordinated ones, or many are not heard at all. Thus, a discourse is how people negotiate their points of view and how marginal voices make attempts to make themselves heard.**

JAMES CLIFFORD: Like all core post-modernists, James Clifford also advocated the idea that an **objective viewpoint in studying and writing ethnography is not possible.** For him ethnography makes the author describe it with persuasion where her/his preferences unconsciously come forward. Hence for Clifford, to deconstruct or critique the way ethnographies are written is the main essence of post-modernism. To do away with the rhetoric by which ethnographers assert power, ethnographies should be more descriptive than being completely interpretive.

CRITICISM

For many the school of thought is vague and worthless. It adds nothing analytical to present system of knowledge.

One, and perhaps the most common, focuses on the idea that postmodernism attacks the scientific and methodological bases of the discipline. Many empiricists and positivists claim that postmodernism has moved the discipline toward a nonscientific basis, perhaps more toward the humanities.

An additional form of this critique has been the argument that postmodernism steered professional anthropology away from concerns with fieldwork and into concerns with ethnography as a textual object.

Post modernism leads to multiple interpretation of a single phenomenon contributing to confusion and absurdities.

British anthropologist Ernest Geller attacked Post modernism by saying that post modernism was **self absorbed** and **highly subjective** in nature.

