

Does Reality Exist?: Criticality of Post-Structuralism



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Abstract

Does reality exist? Today, our sense of reality is threatened by multiple narratives, images and information. Again, the truth as a fact is also constructed and influenced by the Medias and dominant discourse. The relativity of reality is subject to epistemology, different value system and cognitive differences. The reflection of reality, as if, is a matter of interpretation. In the post-structural regime the structural knowledge and the universality of knowledge has been challenged. The idea of a stable centre and euro centric knowledge structure has become provincialized in the post colonial epistemological expansion. The existential reality and intellectual perplexity threatens the understanding of reality. In this backdrop the paper would examine the nature of reality in the post structural arguments by analyzing the contents of post structural texts and theories. The paradigm of dominant discourse, language and power influences the construction of 'reality' and how it is understood that has been revisited through theoretical lens of post structural theorists, viz., Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, Lyotard, Deleuze and etc. The paper is based on conceptual analysis of post structural thoughts. Apart from this, the present socio-political discourse has been examined through critical discourse analysis. Tracing difference and multiplicity the paper highlights the importance of plurality and multiculturalism that is obviously a focal theme of post-structural thoughts. Thus, it is an attempt to contextualize the concept of 'reality' in the light of post structural arguments.

Keywords: *Cogito, Dominant Discourse, Epistemology, Heterotopia, Reality, Simulations*

Introduction

To begin with the idea we must try to develop an operational understanding about the concept of 'Reality'. What does reality mean? Reality is a state of condition that can be experienced or visualized through the sense organs. A state of affairs that can be experienced, though, it differs because of the different cognizance and epistemological premises. What I think about myself or what I know about myself is a reality. Again, what people or society thinks about me that is also a reality. Thus, the dual reality is possible.

Kant (1998) argues that we cannot understand the 'things in themselves' (noumena), rather we experience the matter as it appears before us (phenomena).

Sometimes, it may also happen that the appearance of anything is not real, so the appearance and the reality behind the reality is not the same thing.

So the reality is a complex thing; it is visibility as well as non visibility. In the subsequent discussions we will try to understand the theoretical perplexity about the reality in the post structural arguments.

Reality vs. Heterotopia

The real time space is not at all real within the space of heterotopia. If, it is real, the space outside the heterotopias is not real. So which is the reality? It is heterotopia or outside the heterotopia!

Let me begin by the term '*heterotopia*' as developed by Michel Foucault. Heterotopia represents a parallel space. It is completely different from the ideas of utopia or dystopia. A utopia is an imagined good state of condition; on the contrary the dystopia is an imagined bad state of condition in which there is a great suffering or injustice. In both the cases the state of condition is hypothetical; no real existence of space is there. In heterotopia the existence of space is there but it is different from the visible reality of the society. Time and space both are there but it does not reflect the reality. The rhetorical use of mirror is the classical example of Michel Foucault to make understand the idea. The reflection of mirror and the existence of object both reflect the reality, but it is not the same reality. Logically parallel reality is not possible. The reality of mirror is temporary; that means it is a placeless place. The reality of mirror is subject to space and time. While we bring back our glance from the mirror the reality vanishes. This is the heterotopia of mirror. There are so many heterotopias besides us. The fair, asylum, prison, garden and the bathroom of Muslims are some of the examples of heterotopias of present society, according to Foucault. As if, it is a world within a world. Both have their own existence different from each other. The existence of multilayered space separated from each other. In a fair so many things are exhibited for sometimes. A space is created to accommodate various things at a time. But the real locations of those things are different. Thus, a created space exists for some time. Foucault in his lecture (1967) "*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*" has mentioned some of the probable situation of heterotopias. Gradually, the space of heterotopia is being synchronized because of heterotopias of deviation.

Say for example, asylum is created for the people those who are different from others. If it is assumed that the common people are normal, the people those who kept in asylum are abnormal in the eyes of others. Now question may arise which is the reality. Both of them have their normal existence in their own perspective.

However, the space created for the abnormal people is the heterotopia in respect of societal space. Foucault is critical about the definition of abnormality. He is of the opinion that the definition of normality is determined in respect of the average people belonging to our society. So the concept of reality about 'normal' is very relative. Each and every people have their own uniqueness; so the average yardstick to measure others is not the right way of assessing others.

Norms are determined by the ruling dispensation. Such norms are considered as *normal* which are supported by the dominant discourse.

"Truth is a thing of this world. It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint." (Foucault, 1977:27).

Truth is constructed by the people those who are in power. So the reality behind the truth and the manufactured truth are not the same thing. Truth is also a social construction. In the epoch of social media the factual truth cannot be judged easily; opinion is constructed by the media houses.

Baudrillard (1982) emphasized on the role of electronic mass media; in his words "T.V. is all".

It threatens our sense of reality by circulating images and information which are composed and manufactured. In the present society, "The proliferation of signs and images has effaced the distinction between the real and the imaginary -art has triumphed over reality," he says. (Cited by Kaviraj. 2005: 19).

Today, multiple narratives are being circulated regarding the same issue; we cannot affirm the reality as our sense of reality is threatened.

Reality and the Body and Mind

It is docile body which is shaped and presented in a form where everything is controlled. Now it is predetermined how an ideal body size, body

weight, birth control, sexuality and other factors relating to body should be there. We are trained to believe that this programming of body will help us to stay healthy and free from diseases. Even, what kind of food we will consume that list would be prepared by nutritionist. And it is deeply rooted in our belief system that if we follow the diet chart we will remain healthy. Our thought process is regulated and guided by the psychologist. Free and critical thinking are subject to surveillance. Body and mind are constantly being monitored by the experts. People are trained how to stay disciplined through producing knowledge. According to Foucault, today, people are considered as population and they are trained so that they can accustom to this societal norms (Foucault, 1977). It is a constructed reality that cannot be denied.

In *Birth of the Clinic* (2003) we see the philosophy of representation and the disappearance of the signifier as doctors penetrated in the process of modern medical treatment. Now the body and mind of the patient is in the hands of doctors.

The cogito [Rene Descartes' arguments, I think, therefore I am.] as appears in the ideas of Rene Descartes (1596-1650), has become peripheral because of subordination of mind. Today, the mind is not free; people are taught /educated if you are homosexual, you are abnormal and you will be stigmatized. So the mind associated with identity is engulfed by the thought of dominant discourse.

Reality and Relativity of Knowledge

The universal nature of knowledge has been challenged today- 'definition of essences is discounted'. The so called criteria: true-false, just-unjust have lost their significance. The epistemological acceptance of science is also challenged; may be, it is one of the sources of epistemology but it is not the absolute one. Knowledge is manifested through the fusion of horizon; it is a fusion between past and present. It is not possible to ignore one's background completely. So knowledge is embedded and inherited from a particular social, cultural and educational backdrop and thus it is shaped and flourished. (Gadamer, 1975).

Reality, Meaning and Deconstruction

The Author creates a text which signifies the mind of the author, but the author is dead after completion of the text. Now it will be interpreted in the hands of the reader. The author has nothing to do with the text. So the reality of the text as developed by author and the reality in the interpretation is completely different. The text is not connected to the author, so the biographical vision of the author is irrelevant here. (Roland Barthes, 1977). In response to this, a critical argument was placed by Michel Foucault. He says that the text is not enough; the author goes side by side. How speech signifies the object, though the structural norms are there to understand the speech of others, but different creates as signifier acts differently. So the reality of signifier is also tangible in nature. In reality the same thing does not create the same amount of impact so the reality as we demand is also relative.

Opposing the idea of logocentrism [Logocentrism denotes the philosophical belief which emphasizes on the importance of reason, logic and language and logos (words & language) are central to understanding reality and truth.] Derrida (1967) emphasized on the existence of 'difference' in which everything exists as it differs from something else. In order to understand the text margins, foot notes etc. can be meaningful. The centre oriented meaning is now deconstructed, he believes, what we construct today, we may have to deconstruct it tomorrow.

Further, you cannot speak spontaneously being afraid of assessing by others. You do not have any autonomous existence; you will be assessed, measured in the eyes of others. So your expressed speech and the real existence of you are two different things. Which one is real..! Your unuttered voice, uttered voice or uttered voice assessed by others. There is every possibility of deconstruction in the hands of readers/listeners.

Again, speaking and writing is not the same thing. What we speak that is not expressed through writing as writing has its own structure; it takes you on its own way where you see a difference in your thought and your expression in writing.

Foucault is of the contrary opinion regarding the existential reality of author. He says, "writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind" (1977:116).

Writing can be understood in the background of author in which society he belongs to. So the writing is the reflection of personification which aims to uphold the unuttered reality and writing is the manifestation of it; sometimes, author transcends himself. Thus, reality is connected with the presence and absence of presence. Foucault knows existential blank cannot be fulfilled; it can only be deconstructed by self. That is why, he thinks, we cannot say at the starting point of writing where and when it will end.

Once, the philosophy of Marxism which was claimed to be a narrative of emancipation is now challenged by the discourse of capitalism. In his book, Lyotard rejected all grand narratives of emancipation as delusion. He declares, "I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984). The post modern society is marked by discontinuity, catastrophes and paradoxes.

The so called traditions and normative values are challenged in the modern society; again the modernity has been challenged by post modernity. So the notion of reality is very relative.

Conclusion

Drawing a conclusive articulation is not the purpose of this writing as the non predictive post structural philosophy does not permit any structural corollary. The connotation of post structuralism would be limited by drawing a conclusion. Again, the term 'ism' associated with 'post structuralism' does not indicate any structural universal formation. Furthermore, the totality of knowledge is also epistemologically denied in the post structural ideas. The 'reality' is the play of light and shadow. The divisive line between white and black is not possible. So what we see and do not see both are the reality. As the philosophy of difference post-structuralism embraces the diversity of knowledge, existence of margin and

encourages multiple ways of truth. In a diversified society no single identity is possible; we have multiple identities and that can be recognized by the authority. It helps us to understand how knowledge and truth are shaped by the people those who are in power, or the agencies like governments, media, corporations and social institutions. It teaches us to think critically promoting the ideas of interdisciplinarity and skepticism toward singular explanations. As it supports the idea that identity is fluid and performative, the significance of multiple realities is recognized which empowers the marginalized groups to challenge dominant cultural narratives and define themselves on their own terms.

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