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Lecture – 8b Derrida, Deconstruction and Postmodern texts

Good morning and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course postmodernism in literature. In continuation with the series of lectures that will be having today also we discuss Derrida, Deconstruction and Postmodern texts. So, we have already taken and look at the intellectual tradition which foreground that the method of deconstruction, we also seen how it departs from other forms of structuralist enquiries and, we also taken and look at the various tools through which we can employ deconstruction in different texts and contexts.

The objective of today's lecture is a fore is to foreground deconstruction as a literary critical method, as much as Derrida has had protects Deccan's the formulation of deconstruction as a literary theory, as a method of criticism it is rather interestic note that in the contemporary, this is one of the most important literary critical methods which have being used, cross cultures across literary words to engage with different kinds of texts.

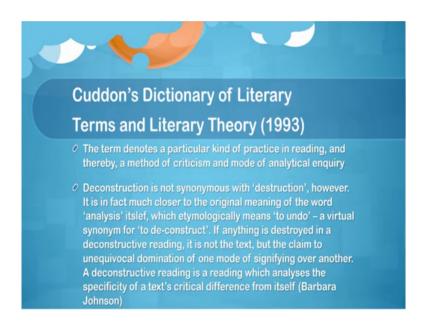
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And also different kinds of context and we calling from the previous lectures it is important to remember the deconstruction is a school of philosophy, which originated in France and also attributed to rogues Derrida and, it also have now had an enormous impact on Anglo American criticism. And when we trace intellectual tradition it is also important to realize that deconstruction was influenced by phenomenology Saussurean, and a French structuralism and also Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

But interestingly though depurative from the various forms for structuralist enquiries, it eventually deconstruction eventually merged as a distinct and a different tool of criticism and also emerged as a school or a movement or by itself.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:07)



If we look at the diverse kinds of definitions available about deconstruction, we would began to notice that the literary and critical definitions the literary and the definitions from the, from within the frame works of literature criticism and culture, dominate the ideas about deconstruction. If you can look at Cuddons dictionary of literary terms and literary theory published in 1993.

This is how Cuddon defines deconstruction. The term to notes a particular kind of practice in reading and thereby a method of criticism and a mode of analytical enquiry. Regardless of how structuralism was originally conceived as a method to protest, the rebel against the various promises made by modernity, with the solution men with the many scientific rationalist practices. It is now rather a historic accident that

deconstruction has been seen primarily, as a mode of analytical enquiry and also some method of criticism.

So, he also extensively quotes Cuddon also extensively quotes from a Barbara Johnson and, goes all to clarify the use of the term deconstruction. Deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction; however, it is in fact, much closer to the original meaning of the word analysis itself, which etymologically means to undo, a virtual synonym for to deconstruct. If anything is destroyed in the deconstructive reading it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over the over another, deconstructive reading is a reading, which analyses the specificity of a text critical difference from itself.

We have already noted how deconstruction does not talk about the destruction of meaning, but about the generation of a meaning by focusing on certain aspects of text which are not otherwise readily available, or which are not otherwise very visible. Having said this at a, at the theoretical level it is also important to see.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:14)



How deconstruction works when we apply it to criticism, when we use it as a method of critical practice, when we use it as an analytical tool for inquiring. Keeping in tune with the departures that deconstruction makes as a shift from the linguistic turn towards deconstructive turn, there is a way in which deconstruction deconstructive practices

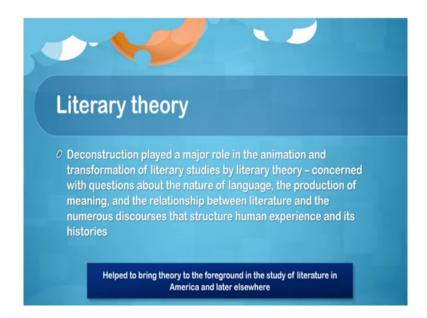
could be located at the level of language, but when we been taken to use deconstruction as a mode of enquiry, as a method of analytical criticism we begin to notice that.

It moves away from the level of language and language is only a starting point. So, eventually the way deconstruction works is a ways in which it begins to critically dismantle, tradition and traditional modes of thought. So, this is the end result which made deconstruction perhaps more popular than any other forms of criticism, any other forms of analytical enquiry, prevalent in the contemporary. Among the many things that deconstruction proposes to do, it explores the tensions and contradictions between the hierarchical ordering assumed and sometimes implicitly asserted in the text and other aspects of the text meaning especially those that are indirect, or implicit, or that rely on figurative, or performative uses of tradition.

So, here the play with language Derridas use of language, Derridas deconstruction of language, leads us to a method which would eventually allow us to dismantle tradition and traditional modes of short and also disturbing district all kinds of hierarchical establishments, all which most of the most of the reason based, most of the rationality, most of the thoughts of rationality, the particularly those of the western tradition have been placed. In that context the focus is on the opposition of meaning that emerges as Derrida has extended extensively pointed out, in his analysis of the signifier and the signified and the difference within a. And here the opposition works in particular ways in order to show.

Deconstruction of the text, and here we also begin to realize that the meaning of the opposition is not something which is which independently exist, but that is also something with emerges from the text as Derrida and also the critics have remind that is in multiple ways. Deconstructionism is not about entirely moving away from the text. Deconstruction is about focusing on the text and foregrounding the things that the text does not apparently make visible that readily and, also about foregrounding the things which we text perhaps hides through the use of particular kinds of language of figures of speech or different kinds of performative functions.

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And when we talk about the base in which deconstruction has contributed to literary theory, it is important to remember that text played a major role as one of the famous products would put it a major role in the animation and transformation of literary studies by literary theory.

And it is also because deconstruction is concerned with the questions about language about the production of meaning and, the relationship between literature and, the numerous discourses that structure human experiences and, it is histories which are also evident and literary and cultural text. In that sense deconstruction also becomes a very comprehensive and, all-encompassing kind of literary theory or critical approach to engage with multiple kinds of text in contexts in the postmodern in the postmodern scenario. And it would also be not wrong to say that deconstruction help to bring theory to the foreground in the study of literature in American and later elsewhere.

It is also perhaps yet another history that deconstruction is increasingly being modified for the American market and the simplified and also, it is also been water down for in the form of hand books read it used textbooks on and so, forth. And though as we have pointed out in the beginning though Derrida resistor all of these moves, now it is rather inevitable not just in the western scenario, but also in the non-western critical traditions and non-western right in practices.

Now, let us also take closer look at how this theoretical approach works in different fields.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:35)



And deconstruction is something that could be used regardless of the disciplinary differences, and regardless of the different differences and enjoiner, or in context, or in the cultural settings. So, if we closed examine deconstruction at work in the feminist thinking, we begin to see some of the ways in which they play with the opposition, particularly the feminist thinkers the feminist writers and critics they play with the of they play with the opposition between the motions about man. And women they also challenge these traditionally given understanding the traditionally given meanings, which are attributed to the ideas of men and women.

They also critiqued the essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, which also forms some of the fundamental aspects of feminist literary criticism and feminist are thinking, as Judith butlers works have been doing, they also challenged the claim that feminist politics requires a distinct identity for women. So, by focusing on this opposition focusing on the difference, within which the meaning making process meaning making process had rest it so, far the feminist thinkers problematize, this difference problematize this distinct identities, which have been formulated and engage with the politics which is a to work, which also produce particular kinds of identities.

So, here the feminist used deconstruction to also lead us to be convened that identity is the product or result of action rather than source for it. So, there is no given kind of a meaning this only certain performances which would produce a particular kinds of meanings, there is no given understanding of a man or a woman, there are only certain performative concepts which are tie with particular kinds of identities.

Here we also begin to note the interconnectedness across different schools of a thoughts, here we begin to see how there is a there is unemployment of the linguistic term to begin with, how that influences the modes of departure for deconstruction and, how eventually that also enables the various critical modes, within the feminist strands of sorts. And this is also been by extension very influential in queer theory, in gain less means studies as well. And here we begin to notice that deconstruction is not something which could be limited to particular kinds of text and contexts, but it is something that opens up the feels of study, also for the foregrounding of alternative practices.

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And this is also been heavily used in critical legal studies, deconstruction has been applied extensively across the various forms of legal writing, to reveal the conflicts between principles and a counter principles and legal theory. And this is also been a rather influential turn from the nineteen seventies onwards, the also explode fundamental opposition such as public and private essence and accident or a substance and forms.

Now again we see that the fundamentally the place mostly where the idea of opposition, and how that generates meaning, and these a different forms of disciplines these different forms of critical practices they engage with this the engage with this idea of opposition, the idea of difference to focus on diverse forms of knowledge is which are otherwise unavailable to us.

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And the field of anthropology which is which also mentions closetize with the practice of deconstruction, you notice that deconstruction contributed to an increase awareness of the role that are anthropological work as play, particularly in shaping rather than describing the situations, they report on so, here also we find that the that is a certain kind of from a practical approach that deconstruction finds in these diverse a fields of knowledge, in the field of anthropology in the critical practices employee in the field of anthropology this, deconstructive method has been particularly influential because, they also contributed enhance the move towards a greater concern about the disciplines historical connections to colonialism.

So, in the close reading of the text and the context and the experiences available the anthropologist, we are also able to critically foreground, the things which were not apparently visible the things which were not available as readymade objects, rather they could peel away the multiple layers of meaning which have already been constructed to

engage with the other forms of hidden meaning so, the other kinds of hidden cultures and hidden articulations to engage with what is not been readily available.

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So, here we are also being let to the possibility of identifying many deconstructions, it not the single kind of deconstruction that is available to us, but there is a possibility of many deconstructions, depending on the fields in which deconstruction is employee depending on the context, depending on the historical possibilities and, depending on the methods required by different fields of study. So, here we also try to list out some of those different kinds of deconstructions available.

For example, there is rhetorical deconstruction employed by Paul de man, whose also an whose an American critic and an act of practition of Anglo American literary criticism and, he is also leading he was also a leading propend end of literary critical theory in the contemporary. And there is a pedagogical deconstruction employed by Gregory Ulmer, who is an American critic who also engaged actively with the novel principles of a hypertext and cyber language.

And then we have political deconstruction of Michael Ryan, way he uses Marxism as a framework to critique deconstruction, we have; obviously, the post colonial deconstruction by Gayatri Spivak, who also initiated the feminist enquiry into subaltern studies and subaltern politics. And there is philosopher there is philosophical

deconstruction of route of Gasche, who tried to locate deconstruction within various practices of phenomenology.

There is also this feminist deconstruction of Barbara Johnson who is critique translator and a leading theories of comparative literature, she is also interestingly associated with the Yale school of criticism. And there are even sub text that we would we could begin to locate from these available classifications, there could be for example, different kinds of feminisms, or different kinds of post colonialisms available to us, which would lead us to the which would lead us to the possibilities of different kinds of deconstructions emerging from within particular fields of knowledge is as well. Believe the apparent diversity and the apparent a differences what is strikingly significant about these many deconstructions other ways, in which they begin to talk about textuality and text.

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Irrespective of the field of study text are available for deconstructive practices, this is also keeping in tune whether dictum that everything is a text. Textuality in within the deconstructive framework is the process of reading and, this process of reading is what constitutes the text. The text is not a readily available entity, it is not an object by itself, but it is rather an object which evolved through the process of reading, which is referred to as textuality.

And there is also leads us to the possibility of text being un decidable infinite and open and, this is also something that we begin started allocating in the discussions regarding a Barthe and Foucault, we also saw that the text undergoes a change depending on the kind of freedom and also that the text needs to be moved away from the authority to voice of the author.

So, in when we begin to locate text, the idea of textuality, within the process of reading what emerges as extremely significant is a point that language does not refer to any external reality. It can on the contrary assert several contradictory interpretations of one text. So, these terms which are being foregrounded in this aspect of in these various aspects of deconstructions which is textuality.

The process of reading the possibility of multiple interpretations, they are all not just limited to the concerns of the book, but rather they have an overarching fire reaching implication because, these interpretations are also based on the political and social implications of language, it is not limited to a connection between the author and the text, as it was conventionally thought to be on the other hand, it is also based on the context which produce particular text. And more importantly it is also based on the context of from which particular kinds of interpretations and particular kinds of readings have been done.

It is also in that sense depending on where the read it as situated, not just on the basis of where the author are situated. And pushing this a bit more we also see that, it is all the difference the meaning of the difference or the postponement of meaning is also something which would affect, range of things suggest history politics economics and even reality itself.

This is perhaps the postmodern impress that we have in the idea of deconstruction itself, because it is and all-encompassing are a framework which would allow us to reinterpret, which would allow us the possibility of a multiple interpretations of everything not just books not just a text, but also history politics economics and even the idea of reality itself. And this difference or the idea of the postponement of meaning is the basis of writing itself has Derrida would put it, Derrida in fact and expensively worked on the binaries of a speech in writing and also had engaged with the idea of difference, as we have already noted and all of this interestingly, they form of basis they form of framework for understanding not just what we are traditionally understand as text.

But also across various disciplines, which normally would not be seen as subject to any kind of textual reading. This reduction of this reductive understanding of textuality or rather, this extensive understanding of textuality would enable us to elevate deconstruction to level that would also enable us to engage with postmodernism through particular frameworks and particular paradigms.

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Now, I am going back to the attention that deconstruction as a practice pay to the rhetorical and performative aspects of language, but continues to play a significant role because, it was this particular attention on language and text on the various aspects of language the performative and the rhetorical aspects of language, that encourage critics to consider not just what a text says, but also the relationship. Now when we say relationship, but not just always a positive relationship it could also be a potential conflict inherent in that.

So, the relationship or the conflict between what a text says and what it does. So, here as we I have pointed out one of the earlier sessions, deconstruction is not something that we to a text, but it is always already it is always already inherent within a text, the text has the capability to deconstruct itself. So, there is a possibility of looking at a text and, decoding what it says and also about what it does through the process of language through the through the analysis of the performative aspects and rhetorical aspects of language.

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And if deconstruction also implies a close reading of text, how would we begin to differentiate, then new critics from the deconstruction us. And in the earlier session also be noted how deconstruction has all has often been seen as another version of new criticism and, we also had indicated that it is not.

Because new critics see literature as a freestanding self-contained object and, in the process of new criticism meaning has to be found in the complex network of relations between it is parts for example, allusions, images, rhythms and sounds. And this process of close reading this method of closed textual analysis is being done to make sense of the ambiguities and, this is what makes new criticism difference a different from deconstruction.

So, new criticism when it was prevalent as a method particularly in the American academia, it was also adopted in the academic and intellectual circus worldwide because, it help them to make sense of the ambiguities, which also I had a fit in very well with the aims of the syllabi or curricula, the critical practices so on and so, forth it was about. It was rather a neat process of doing a textual analysis in order to make sense of the text.

Deconstruction is on the other hand, they see the works and terms of that un decidability, there was an unfinalizability about meaning about a different attributes of the signifier and the signified right at of the right at the outset, they also thus reject the formalist view new critics are also part of formalism, they reject the formalist view that are work of

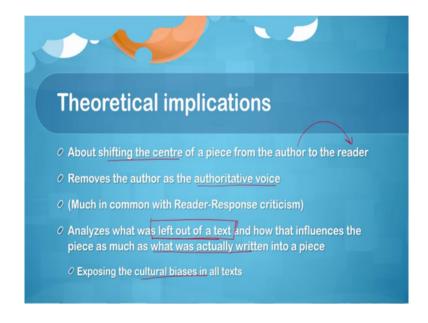
literature is demonstrably unified from beginning to end, that are work of literature is organized around a single center that ultimately can be identity. While the new critics operate with the belief that there is a unified center, there is a structure which needs to be decoded.

The deconstructionist begin with the rejection of this idea of a unified center itself. And if the idea of the center itself is rejected the possibility of finding a unified meaning also becomes a few (Refer Time: 22:21) because there is no way in which one could begin to find a meaning find an ultimate meaning find the core of the text which is not there in the first place.

So, contrary to be new critics expectation of making a sense of the ambiguities, what the decons construction is (Refer Time: 22:39) is to reveal the incompatible possibility is generated by the text, and thus it also becomes impossible to for the reader to settle on any permanent meanings, rather to look for permanent meanings itself is a futile attempt, when we talk about deconstruction. And this is also completely rejects any kind of authority which is being invested, either to the author or to the critic who wants to foreground a single meaning.

Here we again find the privileging of the reader which, we started talking about right through a discussions of births death of the author and focus what is an author.

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So, what are the theoretical implications of such a process here, we here we also reiterate some of the things that, we us that we highlighted during our discussions of Barthe and Foucault deconstruction is also about shifting the centre of a piece from the author to the reader. This shift is extremely important we would see in the various readings that, we undertake as part of this a courses part of a discussions on post modernism and, the author is a it is not always about the death of the author, it is not always about the dismissal of the author, but it is also it is primarily about the removal of the author as the authoritative voice.

Whether the author is there or not the authority that he has over a text no longer access and this a trade could also be a seen as something that deconstruction shares, with the reader response criticism, in a week deconstructive practice we also analyzed what was left out of a text and how that influence the piece as much as what was actually written into a piece. So, what was actually written is not privileged over what was left out on the other hand, what was actually written becomes peal of meaning a layer of constructed meaning which could be peeled away to reveal what was left out of a text.

The meaning making possibility or the impossibility of attributing a single meaning rests on what was left out of a text and for example, will they analyzing what was left out maybe, we would be able to expose the cultural biases, in the text a particularly the ones written from privileged the point of you and this is also something that, we would begin to notice time again time and again in the feminist readings and also in the post colonial readings which are very popular in the post modern scenario.

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Let me also share with you an example from Stuart hall, where he tried to deconstruct the popular. Stuart hall could deconstruct as one of the pioneers of the method of cultural studies, were talking about popular in the context of popular culture Stuart hall reminds us that popular has an obvious definition, that which cells.

And this is based on commercial success on the generation of revenue, but the question is how many records exactly do you have to cell to be regarded as popular, as an any particular definition for the various from context to context we could think about multiple ways in which we could respond to this a question. And there is no one way of talking about commercial success, there is no one way of talking about that which cells. So, it is a contested definition to begin with and, there is also very different kind of a definition which could be attributed to the term popular.

If we talk about a popular uprising, if we talk about the popular upheaval, it is also referring to a revolutionary resistance and opposition may be an opposition which is also based on authentic working class experience, but how do we begin to identify the authentic that is also yet another big question to which there are no single answers. Stuart hall is not trying to solve the problem of the many definitions, which are inherent in the term popular on the other hand, he is trying to deconstruct the term popular, the meanings which are being attributed to the popular to arrive at the futility of a descriptive account.

And this is what makes deconstruction all the more postmortem because, not only is a process of description of process of lack, there is something in lacking in it, but it was also of futile it in because, there is no single proper definition or a proper description that exist within the language.

It is all are based on differences; it is all based on performances as different kinds of theoretical frameworks with tell us.

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Here also some useful a step search tips to engage with particular text through deconstructive method of criticism, this is not a comprehensive list, this is not a must follow list of the steps for doing deconstructive criticism, this just random sample of a set of steps set of questions, which could be asked to a different kinds of texts and contexts.

First of all deconstructive method or deconstructive critical practice would not be possible without questioning the common sense or the prevailing wisdom, which is also being seen as the truth, which is also part of be universalizing essentializing world view because, it is very important to unhinge oneself from the traditional interpretations to be able to engage with the text from a fresh paradigm to peel away the many constructed meanings and access, the things which are not being readily accessible or available to us.

ah Secondly, since the deconstructive critical practice also has the power to expose a cultural biases, we should also be alert to the various forms of biases which are inherent within text within particular cultural or constructs and, this is perhaps you know one could even begin to think about, the western or euro centric bias which is perhaps present in a particular text and to see, how this bias could be exposed to particular kinds of readings and rereading.

Thirdly is to analyze sentence structure this could also be seen as the closed reading or a closed texual analysis (Refer Time: 28:40) why many also get confused about whether deconstruction is another version of a new criticism and, here we particularly pay attention for example, to the arrangement of the subject when the object and, as the subject being the initiator of the action and the object being the recipient.

If I could give a very simple example a statement, he took her to the store, he bought her earrings, he found some food she would like here the subject is he took her to the store, he bought her earrings, he found some food she would like. If we analyze the linguistic parts, if we analyze the different parts of language in this, we also find that the object is to go to the store bought her earrings and found some food, she would like and here the initiative of action is always the male protagonist. We also find that denial of age that is also a denial of agency, for the object who is only the recipe end of these various actions.

So, this could pass of as a simple harmless innocent sentence, but when we approach this from deconstructive angle, when we approach this from critical practice enabled by deconstruction, we begin the see that there is a way in which language exposes some of the patriarchal biases, some of the denial of agency which is inherent in this text. And this sentence cannot be isolated from the general meaning of the story because, this general meaning of the story or the novel whatever that this is part of this on the other hand, becomes one of the ways in which one could begin to expose the various biases, to expose the various forms of privileges which are a being hidden in the text, which are also being passed of as something very common, which is part of common since as part of essential universal truth.

So, deconstruction that sense also sees us to be a mere textual analysis and, it also it becomes a very a political and also a socially concern kind of critical analysis. And once we begin to open up these words and sentences and infinite amount of possible

interpretations and possible meanings begin to emerge and, the final step is to play with this possible meanings, rather and rest respect to once to a one particular world view because, that is what deconstruction is also protesting against. And b is a multiple dreamings which are being made available should be the result of the closed actual analysis that one is doing, and it is not again I reiterate it is not an attempt to make sense of the ambiguities, but it is an atom to open up the text, open up language, to various multiple interpretations which would even be in conflict with one another.

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Quick comparison between the 2 text Jane Eyer and wide Sargasso sea will also be useful to understand deconstruction in practice.

Jane Eyre as we know is a very popular Victorian novel authored by charlotte Bronte, it was written in 1847 and wide Sargasso sea is a 20th century text, author in 1966, for the uninitiated Jane Eyre is the novel about the protagonist Jane Eyre herself and, it is in the form of a bildungsroman, it is about her childhood about her coming into ages of women and her relationships that and complications which are involved in it and, how she is also highlighted as an embodiment of virtue.

As symbol of Victorian women hood and, how she also finds her place within relationships, within the society and, within the structure of family by foregrounding her own character as the angel in the house. These are the madwoman in the attic who is also

being present as a count of all to Jane Eyres character without going into the details of the story because time does not permit us to do.

So, wide Sargasso sea by (Refer Time: 32:40) is a work which foregrounds the story of this madwoman in the attic, who was close to being (Refer Time: 32:45) in Jane Eyre by charlotte Bronte, here we find the 1966 novel deconstructing the 1847 novel to generate a new text and, how is this being made possible, first of all we can see that three different way in which we can look at the transition the departure that wide Sargasso sea makes from Jane Eyre.

ah first of all Sargasso sea is a feminist critique of Victorian values which Jane Eyre also embodies, it supposed suppose colonial criticism of a western colonization, which is in a certain way being celebrated in Jane Eyre text and, the text and also the many critics of Jane Eyre, there are also rather oblivious to this inherent celebration of colonization the colonial practices of the west, which were also evident in the relationship between in the man woman relationship, which was (Refer Time: 33:38) in Jane Eyre and it also postmodern wide Sargasso sea is postmodern at various levels because, it engages with the story in from different perspectives.

It engage it wide Sargasso sea sees us to be the story of Jane Eyre it sees us to be the story of madness the madwoman in the attic, it becomes a engagement with madness, with marginality, with otherness with relationships with marriage, the institution of marriage, with displacement, exile and identity crisis. These are not new elements that (Refer Time: 34:11) began to invent from Jane Eyre, but rather these were the things which were always already present in the text Jane Eyre all that (Refer Time: 34:21) did in Wide Sargasso sea was to expose the gaps, was to just peel away the multiple layers of constructive meanings, to expose the buyers is inherent in it, to expose the various agendas the various political, ideological agendas the various patriarchal (Refer Time: 34:37) centric biases which were inherited the text.

By allowing a playoff all these multiple conflicting elements and identities in the text Wide Sargasso Sea, by engaging with feminism in post colonialism in particular ways Wide Sargasso Sea, becomes a typical postmodern text itself.

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In the nutshell what Wide Sargasso Sea seeks to do is it is not to present itself as a complementary work to Jane Eyre, rather it discovered the gaps and, wrote back of feminist and the postcolonial text. And postmodern frameworks I would say enabled how to do so.

The gaps she also in wide Sargasso sea we find the foregrounding of the gaps available within the text and, which is this is also being made possible after deconstructs to Jane Eyre, after having read between the lines of the novel, wide Sargasso sea is a novel which comes into being, after having deconstructed Brontes novel, in order to create another novel, but the totally different likes different perspective which is largely non western. And here these are the multiple ways in which be novel bytes Sargasso sea also becomes postmodern, it engages with the place with postmodern intertextuality, fragmented, narrative, multiple narrators the problematization of englishness as a national and cultural identity that may or may not be dependent on race.

It also exposes the various historical racial and, social hierarchies on which the western, civilization unfortunately rests.

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So, whether we are talking about toward holds deconstruction of the popular, or the and simple subject object analysis of a simple sentence, or the deconstruction of a particular novel, what is postmodern about deconstruction. So, as we wind up today's lecture, I also leave you with your understanding that deconstruction is also a practice. A critical practice which is a inherent to be understanding of postmodernism.

And also that it is possible to engaged with the many postmodern text, through the interplay of deconstruction. And here what essentially makes deconstruction postmodern is a factor red joined hands with other strands of post structural and post modern thinking like we, just now so how post modern could be could be linked with the post colonial and, the feminist modes of thinking and modes of critics, eventually what deconstruction enables us to do. Just like postmodernism drast is to inspire a suspicion of established intellectual categories and, it is skepticism about the possibility of objectivity.

This is where deconstruction begins to make sense, in the postmodern scenario as one of the most efficient tools as one of the most efficient analytical critical tools available to approach, text and various a context. So, as we wind up today's session I also leave you in anticipation of the discussions on intertextuality that we shall be introducing in the following lecture that is all we have for today.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.