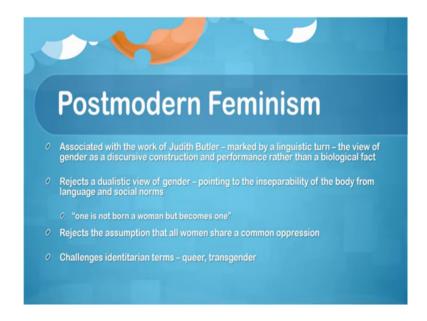
## Postmodernism in Literature Dr. Merin Simi Raj Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

## Lecture – 14 Feminism and Postmodernism

hello everyone I am happy to welcome you yet again to another session of the NPTEL course post modernism and literature, today's lecture is titled feminism and post modernism and it is this needs to be seen in continuation with our discussions of Marxism and postmodernism. And how we illustrated how Marxism needs to be seen in radical opposition and as a contrast to how postmodernist theory is work.

And as a corollary to our understanding of Marxism and postmodernism, feminism and postmodernism has a more ambivalent relationship there are occasions when they contradict each other, but it also exists as two kinds of a complementary forces at work both in different paradigms all together. And we begin looking at the implications of postmodern feminism and what we understand by that.

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Ah it would be appropriate to say that the inaugural moment of a postmodern feminism could be located with the work of Judith butler, and this is something we have already taken a look at in one of the earlier sessions. It is also a turning point from structuralism towards the post structuralism its marked by linguistic turn as we have already noted.

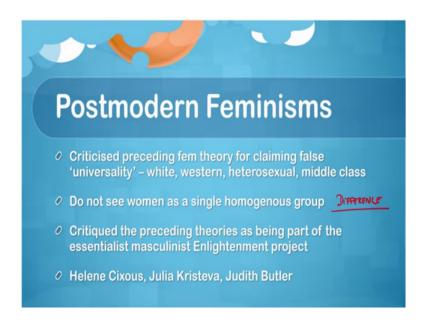
And Judith butler proposed the idea of performativity and a new theory of agenda arguing that gender needs to be seen as discursive construction, and a performance rather than a biological fact. And this sort of a concept also rejected the dualistic view of gender and also pointed towards the inseparability to the of the body from language and social norms.

For example when we talk about the woman as a linguistic construct it needs to be kept in mind that be focus is on the becoming rather than the being in that sense one is not born a woman, but one becomes a woman. So, this sort of play with the language aspects and how it interferes with the meaning making process has been one of the important objectives of a Judith butlers work.

And this sort of an idea also rejects a assumption that all women share a common kind of oppression, and they, they could be clubbed together and a common kind of an identity.

So in that sense the postmodern feminism is also about challenging identity in terms it is a cure and transgender, and also about locating women away from all kinds of essentializing and a universalizing ideas.

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There are certain very market ways in which postmodern feminism the parts or moves away from the existing kinds of feminist theories, the postmodern feminist approach criticized the preceding feminist theory for claiming false universality. And this was due to the use of categories such as a white or western or heterosexual or middle class and postmodern feminist began to argue that these sort of universalizing essentialists are concepts cannot be used to talk about all women across the globe and this also entail that one cannot see women as a single homogeneous group, but should be attentive to the differences, which are inherent within.

So, in that sense the term difference could be located at the heart of all postmodern feminisms, postponed in feminism also critiqued all ex all preceding theories as being part of the essentialist masculinist enlighten are comes closer to the postmodern ideas shared by a number of other theorists. And some of the major proponents of this postmodern post structuralist of feminism are Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler.

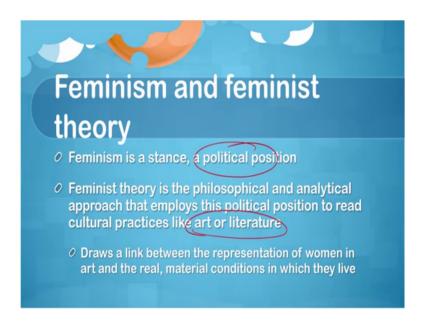
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Postmodern feminism is concerned more with language discourses and relationships between power and knowledge and less about politics and opportunities. So, how does it differ from say radical feminism or Marxist feminism or liberal feminism, radical feminism operates with the assumption that at the heart of all kinds of operation remains patriarchy and this is slightly is an inherently patriarchy.

Marxist feminism moves away a little bit from radical feminism and argues that it is not all about patriarchy it is also about capitalism. And when we come to liberal feminism it talks about gender as a limiting principle, which could how and which could delimit both men and women it talks about giving equal opportunities to men and women. It also does not seek to revolutionize the system, but rather it refers to a work within the system and reforms the systems in a particular ways, in that sense postmodern feminism is very different from radical feminism, Marxist feminism or liberal feminism.

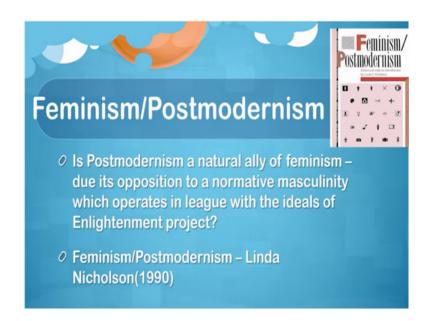
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So it is also important to delineate the distinction between feminism and feminist theory, feminism needs to be seen as a stance it is more like a political position, but feminist theory on the other hand is a philosophical and analytical approach that employs this political position to read cultural practices like art or literature.

So, when we talk about feminist theory it is also drawing a link between the representations of women in art and the real material conditions in which they live, this understanding of the distinctions is very important just like our understanding just like we und we understand the distinction between post modernism and post modernism theories.

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One of the most common ways in which feminism and post modernism has been talked together as their representation is natural allies. So, a Linda Nicholson in her edited work feminism post modernism published in 1990, she asked this person in question this post modernism a natural ally of feminism.

And this is primarily due to be its opposition to a normative masculinity, which operates in league with the ideas of enlightenment project, and this identification of a natural ally in each other for feminism identifying an ally in post modernism and for postmodernism identifying an ally in feminism, this has been a scene as a most common form of retiring the most common form of critic which could be used in this context.

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And there are certain definite of reasons for seeing postmodernism and feminism as complementary forces. Because if we talk of feminist literary criticism which is a direct product of the women's movements of the 19 60s.

We can see that they are those theories and those writers they realize the significance of the images of women, and also realize that it is vital to combat them and question their authority and the feminist literary critical practices were also defined against the traditional representation of women.

In similar ways post modernity or post modernism was also characterized by smaller and multiple narratives, they also questioned Meta narratives like patriarchy capitalism liberal humanism and Marxism. So, at some level both feminist theories and both postmodernist theories we are moving away from the grand narrative of the enlightenment project and also identifying certain structures of operation which were inherent to those enlightenment projects.

And post modernism moved away from the classical dualist practices and also against a fear and also against the fears asceticism of the 19th century works and they also reacted against the absolute unitary conception of knowledge. So, these two ideas in which feminist theory moves against the traditional representation of women, and how postmodernist theory is move against the absolute unitary conception of knowledge they

go together as complementary forces, though they work in different paradigms it is a difficult not to notice some of the similarities with which they operate.

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And post modernism feminism I have also been seen as two leading forces of a times two leading movements two leading conceptual frameworks which are also very definitive of these times, and the intellectual and the academic culture of the western capitalist democracies they also seem to reflect these two framework they also seem to reject these two frameworks in more dominant fashion.

And post modernism and feminism in that sense they also share they, they certain affinities in their struggles against the grand narratives. And a very important to know that these are not descriptive categories, but they are constitutive and evaluative terms. But this affinity that we locate between post modernism and feminism is not as neat as it looks there are also certain contradictions which are part of this.

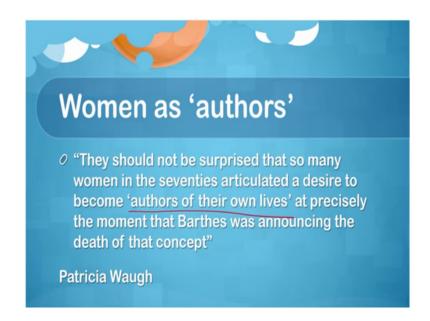
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We if we look at two positions adopted by Linda Hutcheon and Chris Weedon, Linda Hutcheon note said post modernism has not theorized agency. It has no strategies of resistance that would correspond to feminist once there is no way in which the feminist and the postmodern can be conflated and Chris Weedoin also reiterates feminism is politics postmodernism is not it is certainly political, but it is politically ambivalent double encoded as both complicity and critic.

So, that it can be and has been recuperated by both the left and the right, and ignore each ignoring half of that double coding. So, in what will the Hutcheon and Chris Weedon highlights or we can also see the contradictions which are in operation in these discussions related to feminism and post modernism.

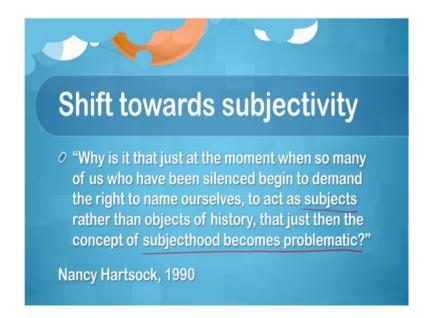
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And Patricia Waugh also illustrates a way in which some of the feminist theories also need to move away from the ideas such as the death of the author or the incredulity towards her grand narratives in her own words they should not be surprised that. So, many women in the seventies articulated a desire to become authors of their own lives at precisely the moment that Barthes was announcing the death of that concept.

so here Patricia was also talking back to the ideas such as the death of the author, because it was also a way in which women who were just beginning to articulate themselves that is where also they are forced to make it themselves because it was the wake of post modernism. So, there are these ways in which post modernism and feminism they seem to contradict each other and they seem not to share a certain kind of politics.

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And Nancy hart stock also shares this same opinion when we talk about the shift towards objectivity, and in 1990 she writes why is it that just at the moment when. So, many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name asses to act as subjects rather than objects of history that just then the concept of subject hood becomes problematic.

Why post modernism celebrates this moving away from history the moving away from subjectivity, feminism finds precisely that problematic because their politics is also rooted very heavily very predominantly on the idea of history.

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And a similar thing could be noted in the differences in the be constructive impulses put forward by postmodernism and feminism, on the one hand postmodern deconstructive theories the deconstructive approaches can be seen as nihilistic as they do not really resolved anything and there is no way of knowing anything, it is a move away from epistemology towards the celebration of ontological existences

a feminism on the other hand it employs a more positive kind of deconstruction, because through the employment of deconstructive practices which are being used in certain texts the feminist practices are able to denaturalize cultural practices and binary oppositions. And this is also a way in and, and it is also imperative that these sort of deconstructive practices employed from the feminist perspective they grounded in the idea that women wear and are oppressed.

So, it is the same surf history which gives a positive impulse to the deconstruction which is being used from a feminist standpoint and it is the move away from history it is a move away from knowing move away from identifying anything as truth or anything is knowledge that makes the postmodern deconstructive approach a more nihilistic and more negative.

And this also brings us to another important factor there the feminists critics, the feminist conceptual framework also had the feminists critics and the feminist conceptual frameworks also have this need to believe in or acknowledge a certain grand narratives.

And also to acknowledge and there is a certain dominant consensus which is in practice which is in place and if we do not do that it becomes impossible to challenge subvert and rigid those grand narratives which have also become the basis become the foundation of various practices of suppression repression.

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While looking at the various ways in which the feminist theories may be posited, in opposition to postmodern theories it is important to look at a Linda Hutcheon. Who seems to have a struck a balance the right kind of a balance in understanding of post modernism in also and also in placing feminism and post modernism together in the same framework during high literary critical practices.

Linda Hutcheon is an is a Canadian academic and she is also the author of a number of influential theories related to post modernism she also has the uncanny ability to place them within the within the broader debates of the contemporary.

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And some of her important works include postmodern reader a postmodern a post modernism history theory and fiction, the Canadian postmodern a theory of adaptation rethinking literary history and also a theory of parody. As survey of her works I would tell you her work focuses on the idea of parody and also on the ways in which she employs post modernism to analyze particular historical and a narrative a fiction.

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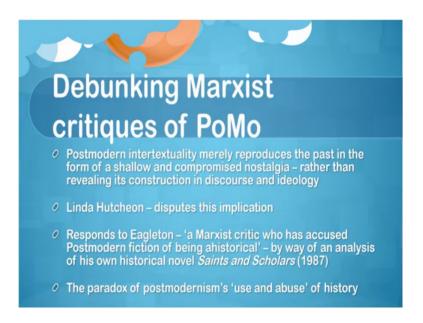


The feminist position Linda Hutcheon adopts in connection with her work on post modernism it drew particular attention with to the base in which she contradicted, the idea of Jameson the arguments of Jameson which also predominantly argued that post modernism suspense the base of any certainty such as history subjectivity or reference and also suspense all kiny kinds of standard of judgment.

And James also lamented the lack of critical capabilities as we have noticed and his work and Hutcheon on the other hand highlights how postmodern modalities aid the process of critic rather than suspending there.

so here Linda Hutcheon uses a very efficient framework a very efficient set of arguments to move against Jameson a position of arguing that post modernism is eventually nothing, but an offshoot of capitalist practices Linda Hutcheon in that sense also takes us through this journey where she where she illustrates that postmodernism works through a parody and how the element of parody helps postmodern text to both a legitimize and subvert that widget parodies. And she also shows through discussion of a range of texts that post modernism can rethink history.

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And for this she particularly sets out to debunk the Marxist critics of post modernism she argues against the dominant notions put forward by Marxist theory such as Jameson and terry Eagleton.

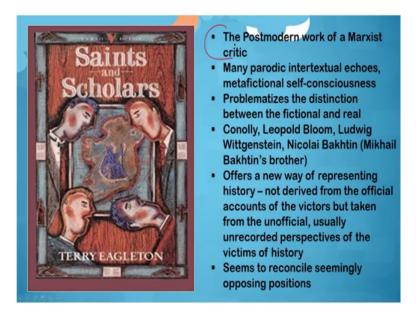
Who also hold the view that postmodern into textuality merely reproduces the past in the form of a shallow and compromised nostalgia, rather than revealing its construction in

this course and the ideology, they also showed through a series of illustrations how there is an impossibility in engaging with political a critic when it comes to postmodern art, how it is all about shallowness and deathlessness, how there is an impossibility to talk about what lies behind the object of art.

But Linda Hutcheon disputes this implication entirely and she responds to Eagleton by way of an analysis of his own historical a novel saints and scholars published in 1987. And eagle tons postmodern novel becomes more important in this context because he is a Marxist critic who has accused postmodern fiction of being a historical, and the irony of the situation is that Eagleton has written saints and scholars which has then begun to be seen as one of the seminal postmodern texts where we also see the paradox of post modernism use and abuse of history.

And in this use of terry Eagleton, we also find la Hutcheon taking a very interesting path a very interesting new literary and by choosing to analyze eagle tons saints and scholars to disprove the Marxist critics of post modernism to debunk the Marxist critics of post modernism, Linda Hutcheon also emerges a salutary critical of victor in this context.

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And if we look at the work saints and scholars by terry Eagleton, it can be seen as a postmodern work of a Marxist critic which is a quite in oxymoron. And we also identify saints and scholars is seen as one of the typical postmodern texts for various reasons we

find a number of parod periodic intersexual echoes in the text and that there is also a sense of met fictional self-consciousness emerging.

And in this work we can see that the Eagleton successfully problematize is the distinction between the fictional and real for example, we have certain historical characters such as cannolly Leopold bloom and Ludwig Wittgenstein and also Nicolai Bakhtin, whose apparently Mikhail Bakhtins brother Ekaton is basically offering as a new way of representing history and this is not derived from the official account of the victors, but it is taken from the unofficial and from the usually unrecorded perspectives of victims of history.

And this sort of an approach that he takes towards history and this take of this sort of an approach that he adopts in terms of his narratives in terms of the textualizing process. It also seems to reconcile seemingly opposing positions, so by using saints and collars by terry Eagleton to debunk the postmodernist myths.

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Feminist practice—in theory, criticism, and art itself—has posed new questions regarding the role of culture in the construction of patriarchy. It has addressed the tacit definitions of gender, class, culture that are operative—and dominant—at any given historical moment. It has joined with the postmodern in moving us away from general universal Truth, to specific, contextualized truths. It has forced us to see gender in relation to race, class, ethnicity and other forms of power relations—not as natural, unchangeable power relations, but as constructed by particular social, economic and political forces. It has overlapped with our postmodern concern for exposing the relationships between meanings produced at the level of culture and meanings produced at other levels of the social formation. In other words, feminism and postmodernism have taught that and how we both make—and make sense—of our culture.

Linda Hutcheon is also drawing our attention to the fact that to collapse hierarchies is not to collapse distinctions, and this instantly is also one of the major critics from the Marxist perspective against post modernism, that post modernism is not attentive it is not sensitive to the to the various forms of distinctions which they also consider as not being very positive or not being very encouraging.

And on the other hand Linda Hutcheon from a feminist perspective she argues that the collapsing of the hierarchies need not mean the collapsing of distinctions and in the same way, it is a pluralizing rhetoric of postmodernism that needs to be highlighted otherwise its entirely to miss the point of what post modernism entails.

And in her own work she talks at length about the need to bring together the ideas of feminism and post modernism in order to arrive at a more informed political critic, I read from her work feminist practice in theory criticism and art itself.

Has posed new questions regarding the role of culture in the construction of patriarchy, it is addressed the tacit definitions of gender class and culture that are operative and dominant at any given historical moment. It is joined with the postmodern moving as away from the general universal truth, to specific contextualize truths.

It is forced us to see gender in relation to race class ethnicity and other forms of power relations not in natural unchangeable power relations, but its constructed by particular social economic and political forces it is overlapped without postmodern concern, for exposing the relationships between meanings produced at the level of culture and meanings produced at other levels of the social formation.

in other words, feminism in postmodernism have taught that and how we both make and how we both make and make sense of our culture. So, this is a kind of a parallel that she that she draws between the feminist practices and also the postmodern conceptual frameworks.

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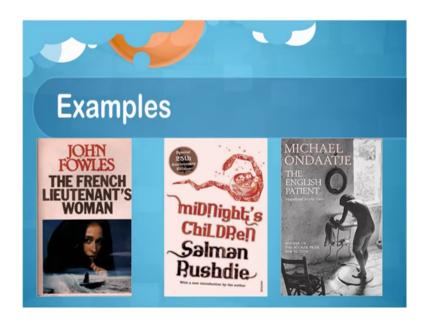


And in the context of her discussion of similar texts such as terry Eagleton saint sense scholars, Hutcheon also uses this very interesting phrase which she herself had coined historiographic metafiction. She uses this term historiography metafiction to describe those literary texts that assert an interpretation of the past, but are also intensely self reflexive.

And this kind of fiction this kind of metafiction which uses a history in a particular way, they are also critical of their own version of truth as being partial biased and incomplete and therein liesy the self-reflexivity of the text. And this a metafiction also has an advantage it allows us to speak constructively about the past in a way that acknowledged that acknowledged the falsity and violence of the objective historians past.

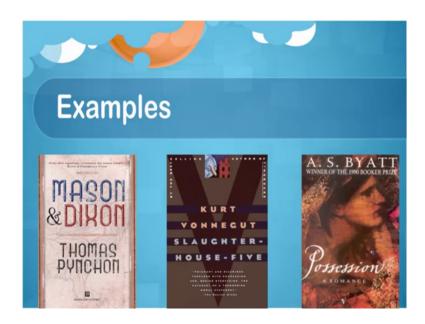
So there is a possibility to engage with fiction, and there is also a very real possibility of offering a political critic here we use and abuse of history as Hutcheon puts, it comes into a play in different forms in historiographic metafiction.

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There are certain works that she herself cites his examples of historigraphic metafiction it is john fowls the French lieutenants woman Salman Rushdie's midnights children the English patient by Michael Ondaatje.

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Thomas Pynchon's mason and Dixon and Kurt Vonnegut slaughter house five and also a s byatt possession.

So, all of these novels they engage with the idea of history in a very playful way they engage with the idea of history and also give an interpretation of the past, but from a

very fictional from a very self-reflexive from a from a point of view that entirely challenges history truth and all kinds of finality. So, this term historical metafiction has been increasingly used to analyze and critically engage with the fiction produced during the postmodern age.

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It is also important to run you through some of the other important feminist interventions of this appearing the most important one being a Patricia was a feminine affections published in 1989 and there is also the term coined by Alice jardine, gynesis is in the context of her discussions in opposition to the gyno critics and how the new term could be used to talk about the postmodern feminist, but; however, the term and the idea did not get much currency as she had hoped.

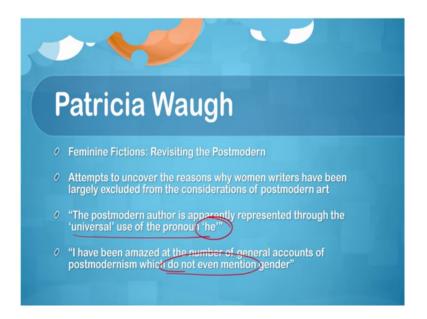
And we have Mary Jacobus talking about not the sexuality of the text, but the textuality of sex and here we also find a lot of discussions relating to the body and about the need for writing the body in the context of postmodern are feminist's discussions.

and Catherine Belsey spoke about juxtaposing the realist and the postmodern strategies for a more politically effective rendition more politically effective articulation of history and of fiction, because she felt and argue that when you come back recognizable realist elements of fiction and also use them to challenge the conventions through disruptive strategies there is a possibility for a more effective kind of political strategy to emerge.

And she also used the term interrogative text to talk about this kind of fiction, which would use realist elements, but also certain subversive and disruptive strategies.

Craig Owens talked about feminism as an instance of postmodern thought and we have Donna haraway who wrote the manifesto for cyborgs in 1985. So, there are two moments which are particularly important in today's discussion for us one is Patricia Waugh's feminine fictions and Donna haraways idea of the cyborgs. So, we book and our discussion of postmodern feminisms between Patricia Waugh and Donna haraway.

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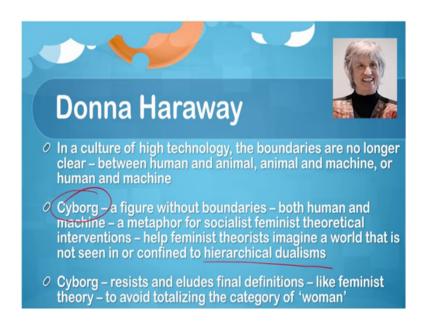
A Patricia Waugh wrote this immensely popular and important influential work titled feminine fictions revisiting the postmodern. In this she attempted to cover the reasons why women writers have been a largely excluded from the consideration of postmodern art, if we look at our own discussions the ways in which we had been looking at the postmodern theories the postmodern conceptual frameworks in the last couple of weeks. We have also noted this conspicuous absence of women from the entire discussion.

The female writers the female thinkers and theories they are foreground and only when we particularly talk about feminism when we particularly talk about gender. So, with the exception of Julia Kristeva or Judith butler or Helene Cixous we do not have much of a discussion of women or women artists in the postmodern scenario.

And Patricia Waugh, Patricia Waugh also points out that the postmodern author is apparently represented through the universal use of the pronoun he. And this is very ironic and this is very disturbing, particularly because postmodern theories they seem to argue against the meta narratives they seem to move away from all kinds of, limiting descriptions and limiting frameworks, but at the same time it continues to be quite a patriarchal even when we move away from all those structures which support the grand narratives such as patriarchy.

And Patricia Waugh in addition also talks about how she had been amazed at the number of general accounts of postmodernism which do not even mention, gender and this conspicuous absence cannot be overlooked it could not be construed as an oversight, because it is also one of the ways in which post modernism defines itself post modernism frames itself by moving away from all grand narratives and all kinds of limiting frameworks and binaries, while this sort of an absence remains central to the discussions of feminism and post modernism. It is also an important thing that we need to come back and engage with.

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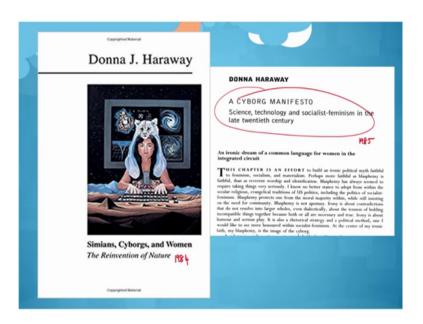
It is equally important to take a look at donna haraways work on cyborgs which also a challenge is the newer possibilities and for engaging with feminism in postmodernism in a more systematic fashion. A donna haraways work is acquires a lot of significance in a culture of high technology, where the boundaries are no longer clear she talks about how

the distinction between a human and animal, animal machine or a human and a machine are increasingly getting blood in this age of increased in this age of information technology.

And she also particularly talks about the figure of cyborgs to talk about a new kind of feminism which is available to us. And cyborg is a figure without boundaries it is both human and machine, it is also used as a metaphor by a haraway to talk about the socialist feminist of theoretical interventions and in that sense haraway is also arguing she is also illustrating through the use of cyborgs that it may help a feminism theorist imagine a world that is not seen in or confined to hierarchical dualisms.

So, by imagining a new kind of figures it is as that of a cyborg which challenges boundaries and distinctions it is also giving a leeway to the postmodern feminist movement, because cyborgs of resists and eludes final definitions in various ways and this should be this haraway argues case like feminist theory the intention of which is to also avoid totalizing the category of woman.

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And Donna haraway is particularly noted for two of her works simians cyborgs and women reinvention of nature, and also her essay a cyborg manifesto which was published in 1985 the book was in 1984.

So, these two important works also could be seen as a major intervention in locating the need for feminism and locating how feminism operates in this age of cyborgs in this digital age of technology, caught between these opposing positions that Patricia Whaugn Donna haraway holes.

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It is also important to look at some of the new articulations from the feminist standpoint, this interesting work Sara Ahmed differences that matter feminist theory and post modernism published in 1998. It deserves a special mention in this interesting work Sara Ahmed talks about the need to challenge the existing ways of theorizing the relationship between feminism and post modernism, because there are certain limited ways there are certain conventional predictable ways conventional the relationship between feminism and postmodernism gets located.

And postmodernism Sara Ahmed argues has been allowed to dictate certain feminist debates and she also argues that instead of this feminism must be allowed to ask questions of postmodernism. And she feels at the way ahead the way to go forward is also by asking these sort of questions, and speaking back to post modernism from a predominantly feminist san point.

And this speaking back entails a refusal to position post modernism as a generalized condition of the world, and it also requires a closer reading of what post modernism is actually doing, and in that sense why are the things that she proposes is to examine the

construction of post modernism in relation to, rights ethics subjectivity authorship metafiction and film.

So here instead of post modernism enquiring into how feminism functions, here is Sara Ahmed arguing for the need to examine with the feminist tools how post modernism works and what postmodernism is actually doing.

So, it is important to locate the ambivalence as in these different discussions, it is important to see the different political positions that these discussions in the context of feminism in post modernism adopts and its all the more important to understand how these differences these distinctions and these opposing ideas are also inherent to our understanding of post modernism in literature.

In this brief outline that we have given about feminism and postmodernism you would have also figured out that postmodernism begins to make sense not as isolated kinds of theories and concepts and a frameworks, but it begins to make sense only when it is in dialogue when it is in constant dialogue with other movements such as Marxism and feminism. And it is also important to see how postmodernism begins to respond to these other challenges which are being posited from the Marxist from the feminist framework.

so in that connection in the following session we should also be taking a look at how the moment of the postcolonial, also informs the understanding of the postmodernism how it also plays a certain new demands of post modernism, which would radically change the conceptions which would also radically alter some of the definitions that are currently in place. So, with this we begin to wind up today's lecture and in the next session we shall be taking a look at how the postcolonial moment intervenes and how it redefines the idea of the modern.

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