

Postmodernism in Literature
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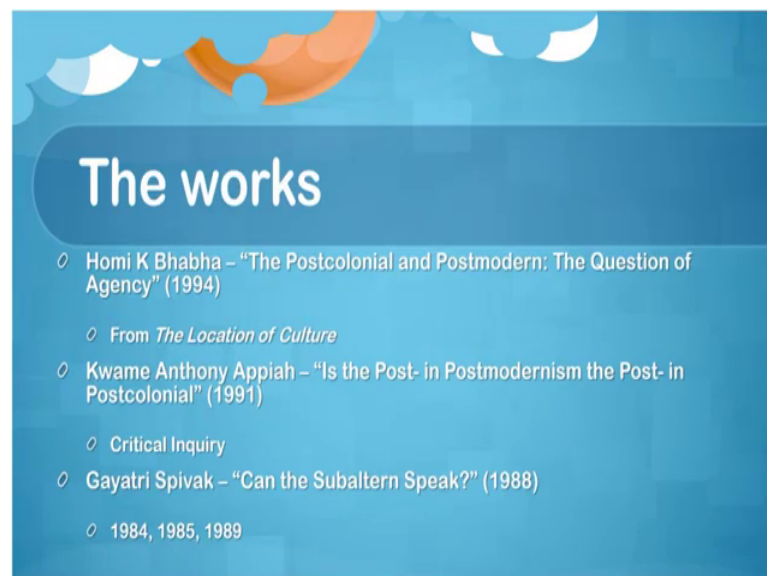
Week – 06

Lecture – 16

Homi K. Bhabah: The Postmodern and the Postcolonial

Good morning and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course postmodernism. In literature today's lecture is titled Homi K Bhabha: The postmodern and the postcolonial. This is a continuation of the previous lecture; we started looking at the postcolonial moment in connection with the various discussions in the context of postmodernism.

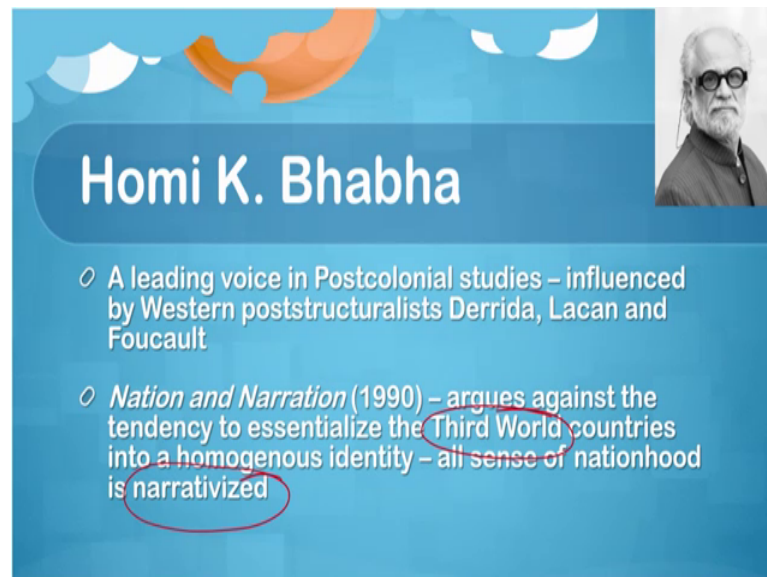
So, we also decided towards the end of last lecture that we will be looking at the postcolonial intervention in during the postmodern phase by focusing on 3 major essays. (Refer Slide Time: 00:44)



1 by Homi K Bhabha, the postcolonial and postmodern, the question of agency which is also part of one of his seminal works the location of culture; the essay by Appiah is the post in the post modernism the post in postcolonial published in 1991 and also the essay by Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak, published in 1988 can the subaltern speak.

So, looking through these 3 essays, we shall be engaging with the postcolonial moment and how it could be used to reframe and redefine some of the concepts of the postmodern.

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A presentation slide with a blue background and a white and orange abstract graphic at the top. On the right side, there is a small black and white portrait of Homi K. Bhabha. The main text is in white. The title 'Homi K. Bhabha' is in a large font. Below it, there are two bullet points in a smaller font. The second bullet point contains the text 'Nation and Narration (1990) - argues against the tendency to essentialize the Third World countries into a homogenous identity - all sense of nationhood is narrativized'. The words 'Third World countries' and 'is narrativized' are circled in red in the original image.

Homi K. Bhabha

- A leading voice in Postcolonial studies – influenced by Western poststructuralists Derrida, Lacan and Foucault
- *Nation and Narration* (1990) – argues against the tendency to essentialize the Third World countries into a homogenous identity – all sense of nationhood is narrativized

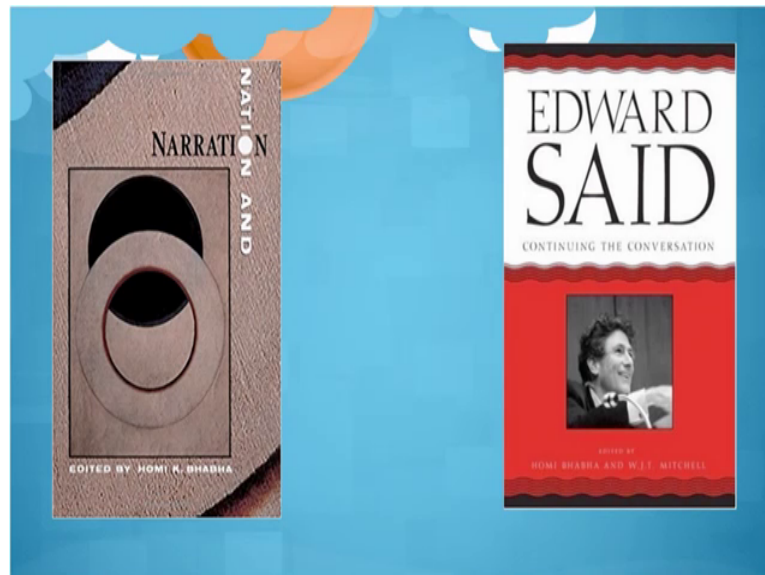
We begin by addressing the works of Homi K Bhabha. Bhabha is the leading voice in postcolonial studies and he is been heavily influenced by western poststructuralist such as Jacques Derrida, Lucan and a Michele Foucault.

So, in that sense we can also see a very predominant strain of poststructuralist thinking in most of his theoretical frameworks. One of his important works, nation in narration published in 1990 argues against the tendency to essentialize the third world countries into a homogeneous identity.

So, in that sense much of his work also problematizes this configuration, the or the formulation of the third world and it also becomes it also in that sense shares the postmodern rhetoric where they where he also rejects the binaries and the hierarchies which are inherently built into similar systems of nations, the understanding of governance and also the different and also the distinction of the world into 2 distinct camps, the third world and the first world.

And a he also makes this very pertinent argument that all sense of nationhood has narrativized through the possibility of narratives, he also negates the way in which nations and then narrations could be a reduced into a singular kind of explanation.

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In addition to nation and narration, other important works include a Edward Said continuing the conversation. Here we also find ways in which he a positions his own work as an offshoot of Saids work. Saids work orientalism which also laid the inaugural moment of a postcolonial studies.

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The Location of Culture

Series of interdisciplinary essays 1994

- Explains why the culture of Western modernity must be relocated from the postcolonial perspective
- Exploits and engenders the moments of ambivalence that structure social authority
- Discusses Joseph Conrad, Toni Morrison, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott – revisits the archives of the Indian mutiny – rethinks questions of identity and national affiliation
- Provides a theory of cultural hybridity and the translation of social differences that goes beyond the polarities of Self and Other, East and West.

And in this lecture, we particularly look at his 1994 work titled the location of culture. This is series of interdisciplinary essays that he compiled together and published and we shall be looking at the 1 of the essays from this collection where he also locates the intersection between our post colonialism and postmodernism.

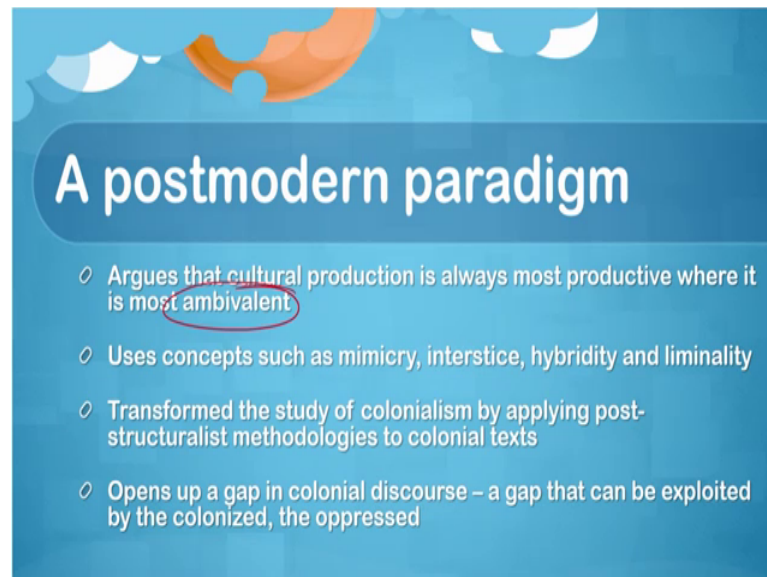
And in this, a work in this compilation of essays, location of culture he seeks to explain, why the culture of western modernity must be relocated from the, a postcolonial perspective. He is also underscoring the importance of reengaging with postmodernism from the perspective of postcolonial studies and not here he is seeking to redefine and reengage with postmodernism from a postcolonial perspective, from a postcolonial point of view and such a perspective certain aspect of study, he argues that it exploits and engenders the moments of ambivalence that structure social authority.

And in this context he also brings in a series of a writers and thinkers together. He discusses for example, Joseph Conrad, Toni Morrison, Nadine Gordimer and Derek Walcott postcolonial writers and thinkers and he also revisits the archives of the Indian mutiny of 1857. He rethinks the questions of identity and national affiliation.

So, in that sense, in this work location of culture he brings together a number of discourses which could challenge the authority of the nation the narratives of the nation. We overall aim; the overall objective of location of culture could be said that it is to provide a theory of cultural hybridity and the translation of social differences that goes beyond the polarities of self and other east and west.

Hybridity is also a term that Bhabha coins and it has also been at the heart of the discussions related to post colonialism as well as postmodernism.

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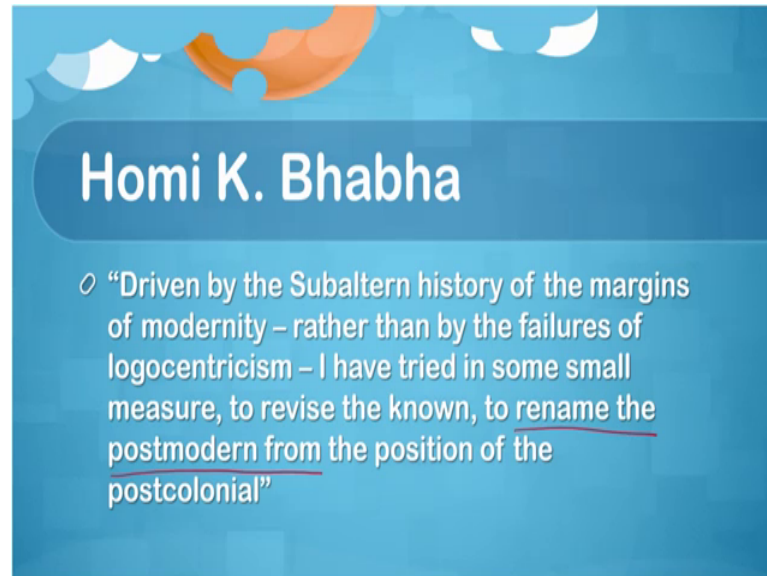


Situating his critique in a postmodern paradigm given the heavy influence that he had a from poststructuralist thinkers.

Bhabha argues that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent and proved that he uses concepts it is mimicry a, in the stress a hybridity and liminality, which are also central terms in the narrative techniques used as part of postmodernist writing. What makes Bhabha distinctive from other postcolonial curious is that, he transformed the study of colonialism by applying post structuralism methods to colonial texts and what is this kind of a reading entail.

It opens up the gap in colonial discourse, a gap that can be exploited by the colonized or by the oppressed. So, here he also from a postmodern paradigm redefines and rethinks the relation between the colonized and the colonizer.

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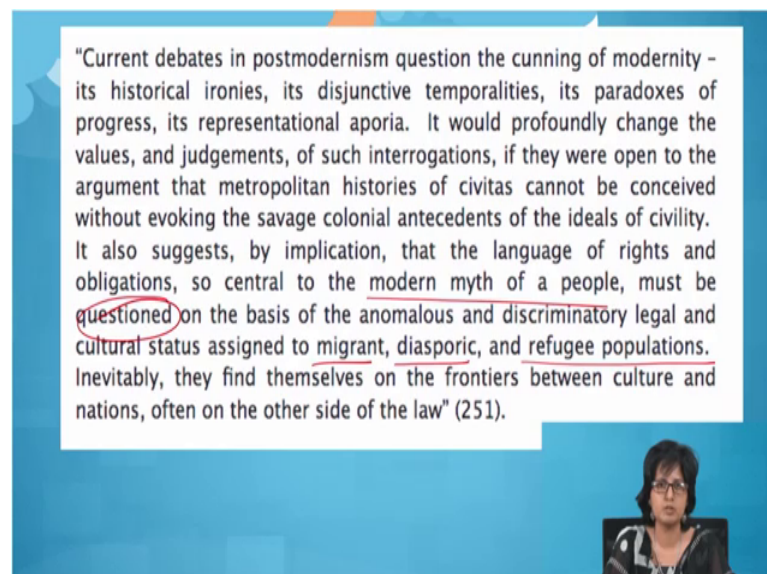
Homi K. Bhabha

○ “Driven by the Subaltern history of the margins of modernity – rather than by the failures of logocentricism – I have tried in some small measure, to revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial”


To code Bhabhas own words driven by the subaltern history of the margins of maternity rather than by the failures of logocentricism, I have tried in some small measure to revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial.

So, this could be a site investment and the major objectives of his work to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial. So, here post the postcolonial moment the postcolonial paradigms is used as a vantage point to look at the post model, to look at the postmodern ideals from a very different perspective altogether.

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“Current debates in postmodernism question the cunning of modernity – its historical ironies, its disjunctive temporalities, its paradoxes of progress, its representational aporia. It would profoundly change the values, and judgements, of such interrogations, if they were open to the argument that metropolitan histories of civitas cannot be conceived without evoking the savage colonial antecedents of the ideals of civility. It also suggests, by implication, that the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between culture and nations, often on the other side of the law” (251).



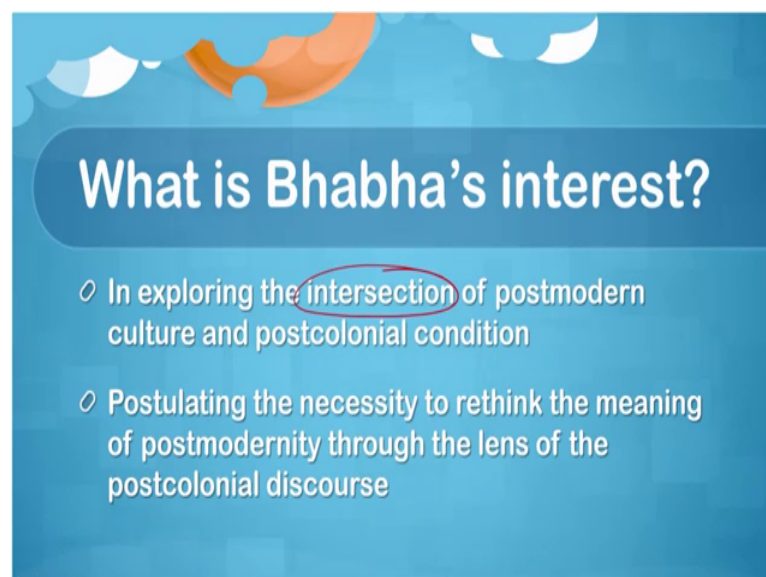
To code Bhabha's own words where he also articulates his concerns rather succinctly, current debates in postmodernism questioned the cunning of modernity, its historical ironies, its disjunctive temporalities, its paradoxes of progress, its representational aporia. It would profoundly change the values and judgments of such interrogations, if they were open to the argument that metropolitan histories of civitas, civitas is a body of citizens, cannot be conceived without evoking the savage colonial antecedents of the ideals of civility.

It also suggests by implication that the language of rights and obligations. So, central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to the migrant diasporic and refugee populations inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between culture and nations often on the other side of the law.

Bhabha draws our attention to how post modernity interrogates the tools used by modernity. It also refocuses our attention onto the various things that a postmodern discourse which is away from the currents of modernity, does not alert us to. For example, about the modern myth of a people or about the state is assigned to the migrant, to the vagabond, to the diasporic or the refugee population.

It is in such a context that he situates the need to address the post modern the postmodern moment from the vantage point of view of post colonialism.

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What is Bhabha's interest?

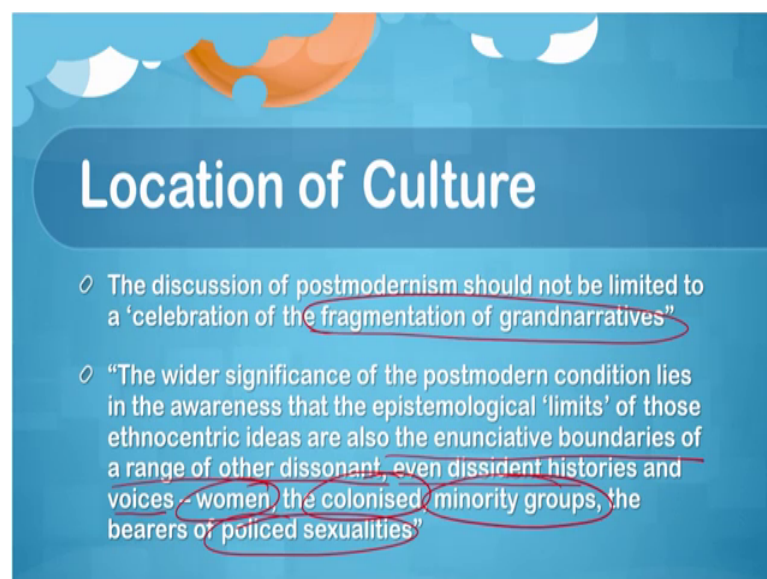
- In exploring the intersection of postmodern culture and postcolonial condition
- Postulating the necessity to rethink the meaning of postmodernity through the lens of the postcolonial discourse

So, what is Bhabha's interest over here? He is interested in exploring the intersection of postmodern culture and the postcolonial condition. So, or a move rather than seeing them as disparate points of, to disparate a phenomena, he is looking at the postmodern and the postcolonial as to important contingents of the contemporary.

And he is also interested in understanding the ways in which they converse with each of them, is interested in understanding how they intersect with each other to quote his own words. In other words, he is also postulating the necessity to rethink the meaning of post modernity through the lens of the postcolonial discourse. Given that Bhabha is writing at a point when postmodernism is also been extensively discussed from different a discursive and from different disciplinary points of view.

He uses postcolonial moment as yet another intervention, as yet another entry point to talk about the frameworks which are associated with postmodern ideals and post modernity and postmodernism as well.

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Bhabha uses some of the important concerns of the postmodern critiques, postmodern theories and he also moves away from them he departs from them in a significant way.

So, as to suggest the uniqueness of the postcolonial approach for example, in location of culture, one of the major things that he stresses upon is the discussion is that, the discussion of postmodernism should not be limited to the celebration of the

fragmentation of grand narratives. We all know how important the in credibility towards met narratives is when we are engaging in any discussion in the context postmodernism.

While Bhabha does acknowledge the significance which is attributed to the breaking down of all grand narratives, the rejection of all grand narratives, he is also asking us to stay alert to the limitations which are inherent in such a prospect. To quote his own words, the wider significance of the postmodern condition, lies in the awareness that the epistemological limits of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices such as women, the colonized, minority groups and the bearers of policed sexualities.

So, here he is also warning us of the dangers which are inherent in the celebration of the rejection of the grand narratives because only by looking at the grand narratives, only by critically engaging with the grand narratives, we are be alerted to the possibility of the enunciated boundaries outside which the a women the colonizers and minority groups and the bearers of police sexualities could be located.

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So, what a certain understanding entail? It tells us that we need to understand contemporary culture as transnational as well as translational and it is through such an understanding that we arrive at radical cultural and literary practices that may move us beyond western ethnocentrism. At some level post modernity is also a call to move away

from the western ethnocentrism, but Bhabha tells us that from a postcolonial vantage point of view, there is a possibility of rejecting a grand narrative.

But also engaging with the outliers, also engaging where the narratives which were projected otherwise. In that sense we are being unable to undo the binary oppositions between the first and third was.

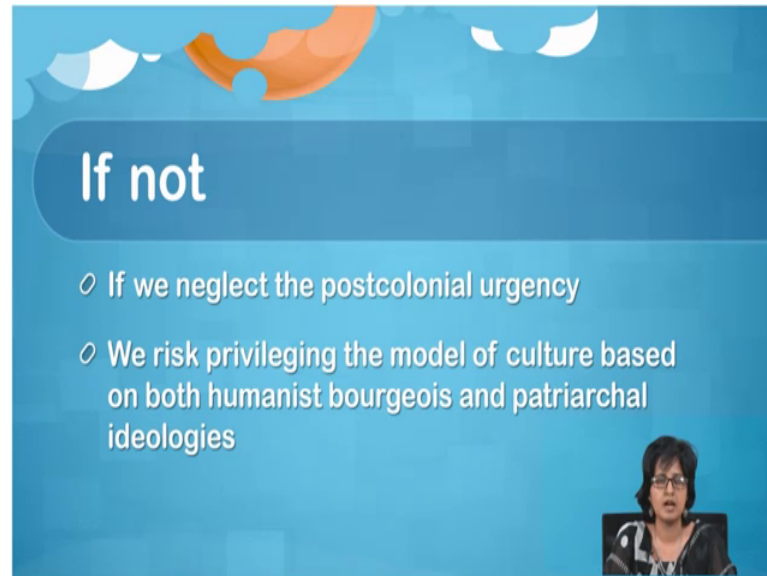
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And how do we go about locating the significance of the transnational and the translational, Bhabha calls it transnational.

Because contemporary postcolonial discourse are rooted in histories of cultural displacement and he uses a term translational because spatial histories of displacement complicated understanding of how culture signifies and what is signified by culture. So, even as Bhabha is rejecting the binaries which are associated with nation and its narratives, he is also exploring the possibility of what lies outside those boundaries? What lies outside those definitions about patients and communities?

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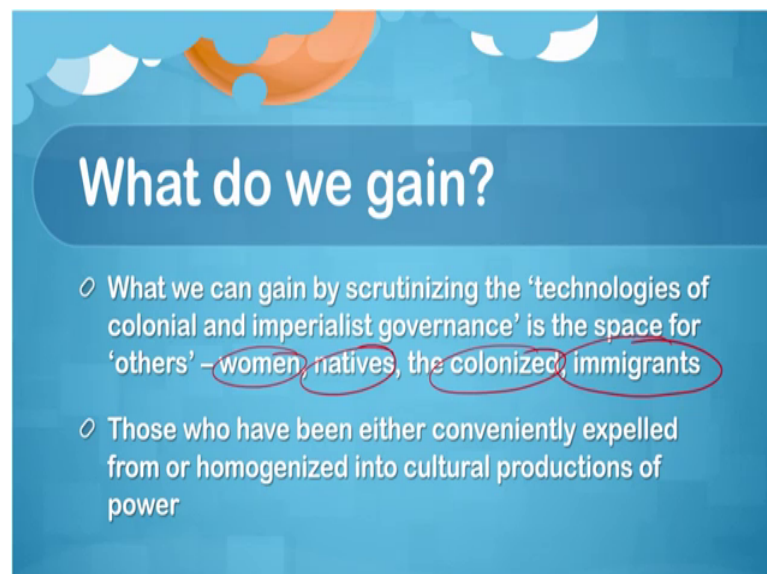
If not

- If we neglect the postcolonial urgency
- We risk privileging the model of culture based on both humanist bourgeois and patriarchal ideologies

Video inset of a woman speaking.

And what happens if we neglect this postcolonial urgency? What happens if we are not attuned to these different possibilities or these differential lenses which are around us? In Bhabha's words, we risk privilege in the model of culture based on both humanist bourgeois and patriarchal ideologies. So, one cannot simply celebrate the fragmentation of grand narratives, but also needs to situate, understand and locate what lies outside those narratives, what is its take when we celebrate those grand narratives.

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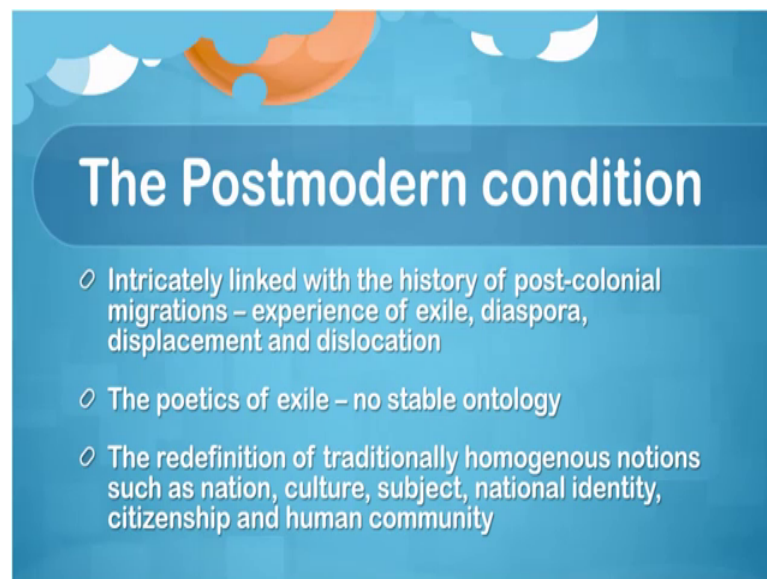


What do we gain?

- What we can gain by scrutinizing the 'technologies of colonial and imperialist governance' is the space for 'others' – women, natives, the colonized, immigrants
- Those who have been either conveniently expelled from or homogenized into cultural productions of power

So, in such a process were to be gained, one we can gain by scrutinizing the technologies of colonial and imperious governance is the space for others and these others could include again women, natives, the colonized as well as the immigrants. The list could perhaps go on and these set of people, the others are also those who have been either conveniently expelled from or homogenized into cultural productions of power and those are also the dangers inherent within the a framings of a nation, the framings of the nationalist narratives.

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So, when we talk about a postmodern condition, Bhabha is also telling us about a condition which is intricately linked with the history of postcolonial migrations, particularly with the experience of exile, Diaspora displacement in dislocation, those are also aspects which are part of nationalist histories and when he talks about the poetics of exile, Bhabha tells us that there is no stable ontology on which the poetics of exile could be based.

On the other hand, what we require is a redefinition of the traditionally homogenous notions; it is nation, culture, subject, national identity, citizenship and human community. This is perhaps of reiteration of some of the things that a postmodernism talks about, but; however, Bhabha gives is a possibility to talk about the outliers, to talk about what lies outside the binaries and outside the hierarchical framework, when he uses the postcolonial vantage point.

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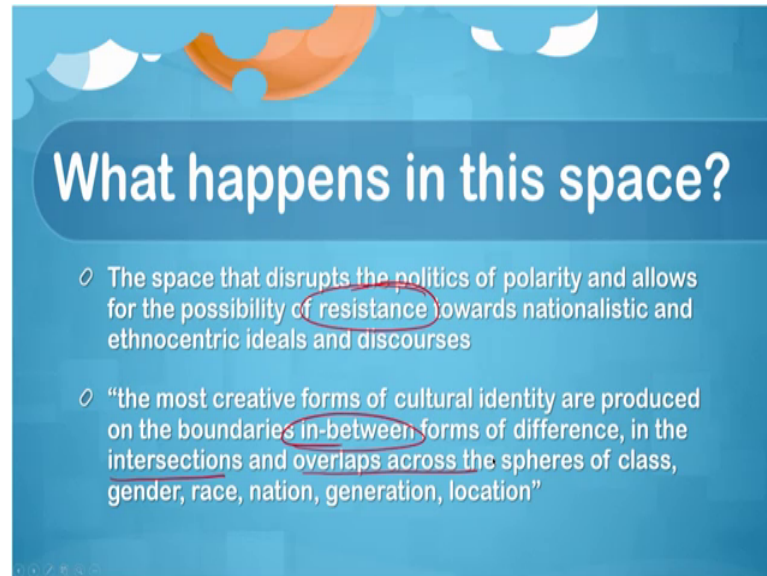


And it is in this context that he introduces us to this idea that he introduces the idea of the third space.

A lot of theorization has gone into the idea of the third space in the contemporary, it has also been used across disciplines, ever since Bhabha started popularizing the usage of this term, in a very loosely this can be defined as the in between space and broadly speaking it could be used as a term to talk about, how we can build bridges between knowledge and discourse. It could be used to the term third space could be used to refer to a navigational space you know to cross and succeed in different discourse communities.

It could also refer to a space of cultural, social and epistemological change, where competing knowledges converse and are challenged. So, the term third space is very useful when Bhabha talks about the challenges which are inherent in the intersection of postmodernism and a post colonialism.

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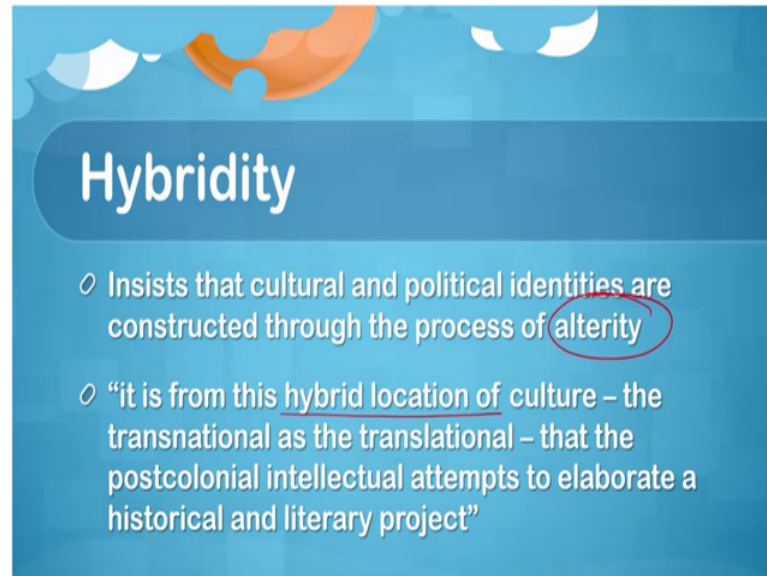


What happens in this space that Bhabha designates as the third space? This essentially is a space that disrupt the politics of popularity and allows for the possibility of resistance towards nationalistic and ethnocentric ideals and discourses.

So, from such a point of view it also moves away from the grand narratives of modernity, but the way in which a Bhabha privileges the third space is needs to be understood in a one 1 fashion, rather than a simplistic understanding of a move away from modernity. In bhabhas own words, the most creative forms of cultural identity are produced on the boundaries in between forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation and location.

So, while he theorizes about third space, it also becomes important to understand what he means by Hybridity by using the term Hybridity which again Bhabha himself coined and also popularized through extensive usage.

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He insists that cultural and political identities are constructed through the process of alterity. In his own words, it is from this hybrid location of culture the transnational and the translational that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical retreat project.

So, here we also begin to see certain similarities emerging rather inadvertently between postmodernism and post colonialism, both could be used, both could be sighted as historical, both could be used as intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical as well as a literary project. Though there is the presence of politics in different ways and both of these are conditioned phenomena. It is important to see as Bhabha puts it to see the intersections to be able to analyze them with a more forceful criticism.

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The hybrid location of culture

- Cultural translation becomes a complex form of signification
- It resists binary structures of opposition, holistic forms of social explanation
- Forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres - the hybrid location of culture

Furthering his idea about hybridity, Bhabha leads us into this conversation about the hybrid location of culture that also lies at the heart of the discussion of his a compilation of essays, The location of culture. So, here he draws attention to the fact that cultural translation becomes a complex a form of signification how it races binary structures of opposition and also holistic forms of social explanation.

So, accordingly it has a very different function to a perform. It forces recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often post political spheres, which he terms as the hybrid location of culture.

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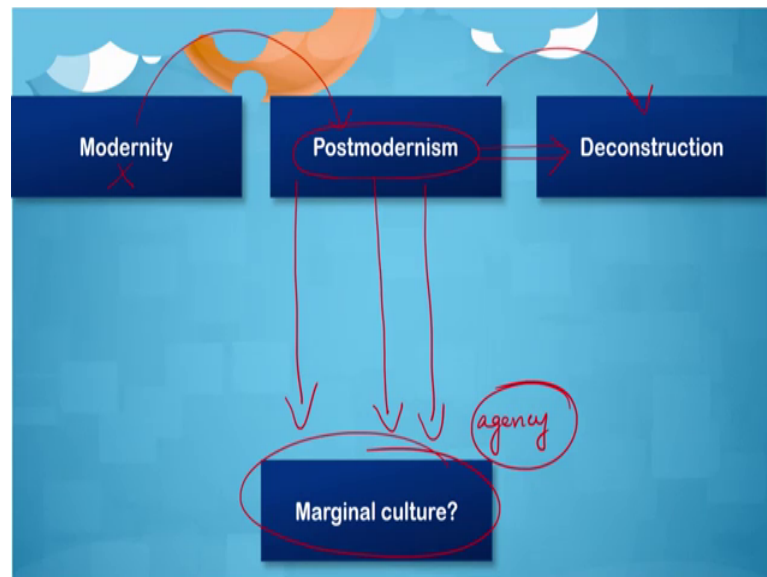
Implications

- Transform our understanding of the narrative of modernity and the values of progress
- Opens up the understanding of what postmodernism means and maintains
- The very language of cultural community needs to be rethought from a postcolonial perspective

What are the implications of Hybridity? What are the implications of a hybrid location of culture? It transforms our understanding of the narrative of modernity and the values of progress which is what precisely post modernity also does, but with a different focus altogether.

The understanding of hybridity in the postcolonial sense, it also opens up the understanding of what postmodernism means and maintains because the very language of cultural commode community needs to be rethought from a postcolonial perspective. What Bhabha encourages us to do is to rethink postmodernism from an essentially a postcolonial perspective.

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Here it becomes important to take a look at how certain dominant modes of understanding have been positioned. For example, when we talk about modernity, we talk about order, about progress, about central meaning, about linearity and postmodernism essentially calls for a move away from all of those things linear, all of those things coherent.

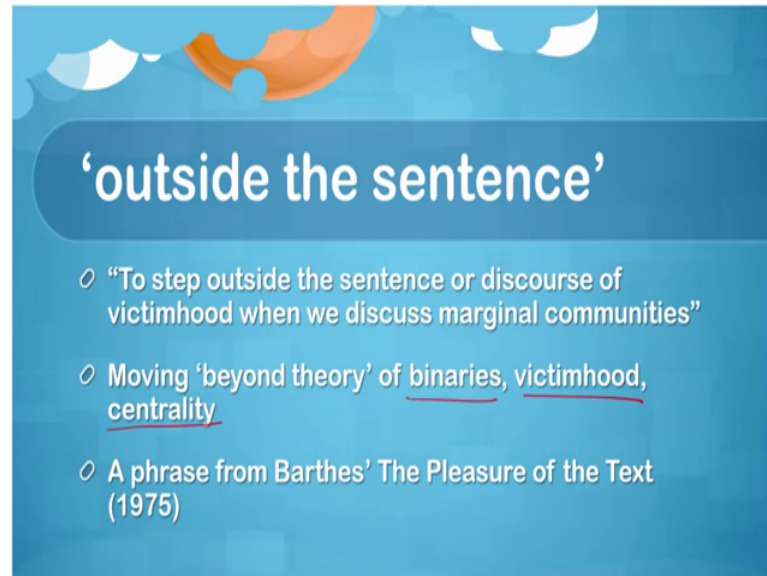
It talks about primarily about a movement in art and literature. It celebrates the absence of all kinds of meaning, there is no central meaning, everything is a text and there are no single interpretations as we have noticed, it talks about how agency becomes a less important aspect, it talks about the death of the author, it talks about the multiplicity of different discourses.

It also leads us to the possibility of using the construction as a technique for understanding postmodernism and that sense we again reactivate the possibility that there is no centre, no meaning and no hierarchy. So, in this movement from modernity to postmodernism and in this use of you and this use of a deconstruction as a method, as a tool to evaluate postmodernism or to rather critically understand postmodernism, way to be locate the presence or the absence of marginal cultures. So, one of the things that Homi K Bhabha does in his work, is to give us a new platform give us a new framework to engage with marginal culture, which does not always present them as a discourse of victimhood.

So, in that sense what postcolonial point of view gives us is a new possibility to talk about marginal cultures because it does not just reject what is at stake in a project of modernity, it does not just celebrate the moves through which this rejection has been made possible.

But on the other hand, it also talks about ways in which the ones who were outside the margins, the ones who were left outside the grand narratives could also be given a sense of agency. So, the idea of agency, the notion of agency which postmodernism rejects at some level and which modernity appropriates at another level, we are enabled to talk about this notion of agency, the idea of agency in a any different point, in a very different way through Bhabhas idea of Hybridity, through Bhabhas a intersection of the postcolonial and the postmodern. The phrase that he uses outside the sentence has been extremely useful to talk about the sense of agency which has been attributed to marginal cultures.

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In Bhabhas own words, when he talks about outside the sentence, to step outside the sentence or discourse of victimhood, when we discuss marginal communities. So, this is how he moves away from the dominant rhetoric of postmodernism, he argues that post colonialism gives us a way to step outside the sentence and talk about marginal communities without falling into the trap of the discourse of victimhood.

So, this moving beyond theory moment that he celebrates, it is also a move beyond all kinds of binaries, victimhood and centrality and interestingly the outside the sentence is also a phrase that he uses from Barthes pleasure of the text, a text which was published in 1975.

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If you seek simply the sententious or the exegetical, you will not grasp the hybrid moment outside the sentence—not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signifier nor signified . . . What is caught anecdotally “outside the sentence” . . . is that problematic space—performative, rather than experiential, non-sententious but no less theoretical . . . (outside the sentence) is not to be opposed to the inner voice; the non-sentence does not relate to the sentence as polarity . . . it is the question of agency, as it emerges in relation to the indeterminate and the contingent, that I want to explore “outside the sentence.” (Bhabha, 1994, 81–82)

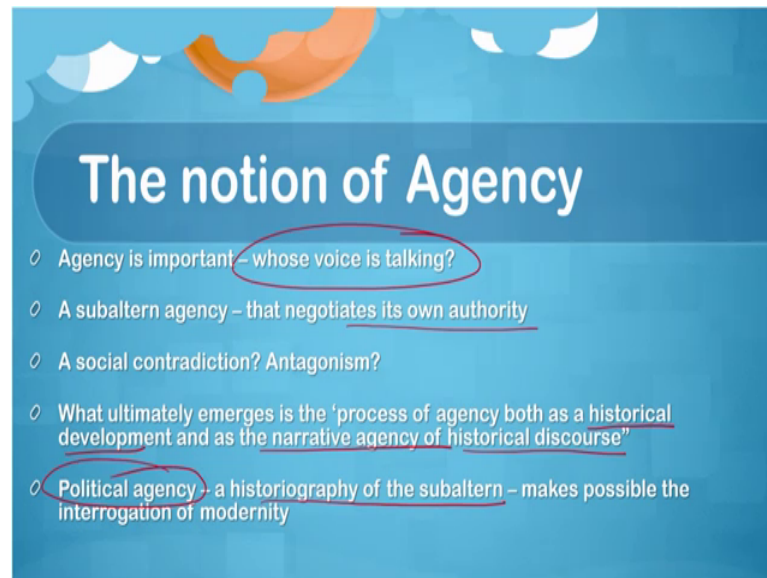
**Outside propositions that claim absolute truth
The experience outside the sentence subverts or go beyond
hierarchy, ideology and closure in some way**

This is how Bhabha uses the phrase outside the sentence in the context of his work location of culture. I quote Bhabha, if you seek simply the sententious or the exegetical, you will not grasp the hybrid moment outside the sentence, not quiet experience, not it concept, part dream, part analysis neither signifier nor signified, what is caught anecdotally outside the sentence is that problematic space, performative rather than experiential non sententious, but no less theoretical.

Outside the sentence is not to be opposed to the inner voice, the non sentence does not relate to the sentence as polarity It is a question of agency as it emerges in relation to the indeterminate and the contingent that that I want to explore outside the sentence. So, here the term outside sentence also questions the propositions that are claimed absolute truth and it also talks about experience outside the sentence which support or go beyond hierarchy, ideology, enclosure and some form of the other.

And the last session we also a had drawn attention to the idea of the performative and how it could be used in the postcolonial sense and how it is also an inherent part of our understanding of a gender in the context of postmodernism as in when we begin.

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The notion of Agency

- Agency is important – whose voice is talking?
- A subaltern agency – that negotiates its own authority
- A social contradiction? Antagonism?
- What ultimately emerges is the 'process of agency both as a historical development and as the narrative agency of historical discourse'
- Political agency - a historiography of the subaltern – makes possible the interrogation of modernity

To wind up this lecture it is important to foreground the notion of agency, which is also the cardinal element that separates the phenomena of post colonialism from that of postmodernism.

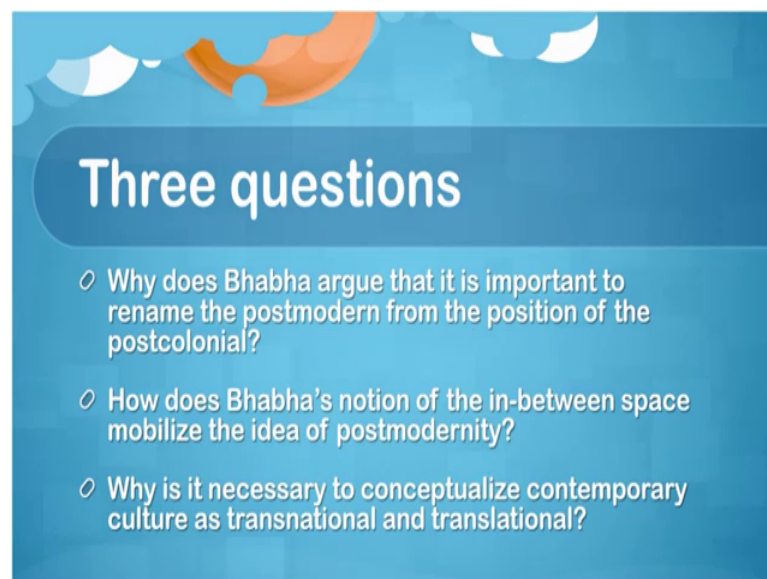
Bhabha is reiterating the point that agency is important because it is important to understand whose voice is talking and when we talk about a subaltern agency, which is also a basis for much of Bhabhas work. We talk about an agency a sense of an identity that negotiates its own authority. This may sound as a social contradiction or as an antagonism,, but nevertheless in such a reading where we foreground or the idea of the notion of agency, when we do not allow the agency to be appropriated by other forces, what ultimately emerges is the process of agency both as a historical development and as a narrative agency of historical discourse.

So, here we also find that Bhabha moves away from the traditional criticisms against postmodernism and he also uses postmodernism as a tool where we can also make use of history, where you can also talk about the historical developments, you can also talk about the historical discourses that emerge particularly when we located from the vantage point of view of post colonialism and a finally, he is also drawing your attention to this idea of political agency and this is again contrary to the notion that post colonialism is a more political and postmodernism is by and large a political.

So, by talking about an intersection between the postcolonial moment and the postmodernist moments, Bhabha is also for grounding the idea of political agency through which you are enable to talk about a historic review of the subaltern and this Bhabha argues makes possible the interrogation of modernity. So, here just like post modernism interrogates modernity and moves away from the grand narratives of modernity. We find that Bhabhas use post colonialism also moves away from the grand narratives of modernity.

But at the same time it also foregrounds a sense of agency a sense of Walton historiography because it is also important to locate outliers, what lies outside the grand narratives, the forces, the elements and the mainly identities and aspects that they were neglected in the foregrounding of a grand narrative.

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To sum up I also leave you with 3 important questions that I encourage you to and engage with as part of your own critical evaluation and understanding.

Why does Bhabha argue that it is important to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial? You will perhaps locate an answer when we begin to discuss some of the postcolonial are texts which are also postmodern in nature. Secondly, how does Bhabhas notion of the in between space mobilize the idea of post modernity?

This again becomes important when we talk about marginalized identities and how the foregrounding of marginal culture is being enabled by the postmodern, our culture through an intervention of the post colonialism and thirdly why is it necessary to conceptualize contemporary culture as a transnational and translational? Again when we come back to look at some of the seminal text, in which we can also identify an intersection of other postmodern and the postcolonial.

We should perhaps address these questions again and meanwhile I strongly encourage you to read through the first chapter of the location of culture which would also give you a very different understanding of the postmodern moment through the lens of post colonialism that is all we have for today.

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