

English (Hons) Part-III; Paper-V; Unit-5; Topic-  
"Structuralism"; Lec-Nr-50; by: GANESH KUMAR  
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## STRUCTURALISM:

Structuralism is an intellectual movement that made significant contribution not only to literary criticism but also to philosophy, anthropology, sociology and history.

In the mid-1940 the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss used the term 'Structuralist', inspired by contemporary linguistics under the influence of Roman Jakobson, to characterize his method of analysis of social phenomenon, arguing that analysts should develop models to reveal the underlying structural mechanism which order the surface phenomena of social life. In political perspective it can be evident in structuralist Marxism which often claims that Marx's theory of exploitation is an example of an underlying causal mechanism at work in society.

The term 'Structuralism' pertains to the theories of French authors, C. Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and their counterparts in other parts of the world. The most prominent name in the study of Structuralism, however, is Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist. Whose concept of the phoneme (the smallest basic speech sound or unit of pronunciation) and his idea that phonemes exist in two kinds of relationships: diachronic and synchronic is particularly useful to structuralists.

A phoneme has a diachronic or "horizontal" relationship with those other phonemes that precedes and follow it (as the words appear, left to right, on this page) in a particular usage, utterance or narrative - what Saussure called "Parole" (French for "word"). A phoneme has a synchronic or "vertical" relationship with the entire system of language within which individual usages, utterances or narratives have meaning - what Saussure called "Langue" (French for "tongue" as in "native tongue", meaning language). Thus Saussure pioneered the distinction between Langue and Parole and sought to define the operation of language in accordance with the principle of combination and difference. His work "Course in General Linguistics", too, provided the foundation for the methodological analysis of sign systems whose objective is to investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them.

C. S. Peirce gave structuralism three important ideas for analysing the sign systems that permeates and define our experiences. His tripartite division of signs in "Icon" (a sign possessing a similarity to its object), "Index" (a sign physically associated with its object) and last but not the least, "Symbol" in which the signifier's relation to the thing signified is completely arbitrary and conventional. These elements become

very important when we move into deconstruction in the postmodernism resource. Peirce also influenced the semiotic school of structuralist theory that uses sign systems.

Semiotics, simply put, is science of signs. Semiology proposes that a great diversity of our human action and productions - our bodily postures and gestures, the social rituals we perform, the clothes we wear, the meals we serve etc - all convey "shared" meanings to members of a particular culture and so can be analyzed as sign which functions in diverse kinds of signifying systems.

Linguistics (the study of verbal signs and structures) is only one branch of semiotics but supplies the basic methods and terms which are used in the study of all other social sign systems.

Thus, structuralism is a study of the cultural construction or identification of meaning according to the relations of signs that constitute the meaning-spectrum of the culture. It is not necessarily an intrinsic fact of nature but rather is a way of thinking. It is not an intrinsic criticism, but the criticism of thing itself. It ties the meaning of the world to the meaning of the culture.

Structurally, literature is a whole; it functions as a system of meaning reference, no matter how many words

there are, two or two thousand. Thus any word becomes the parole, the individual articulation, of a cultural language,

Structuralism studies literature historically by studying it as it were in cross section at different times, by seeing in what way literature divides up the traditional topics of the cultural imagination. Structuralism can then yield a fruitful approach to the history of literature ~~more~~ more systematically, as the way in which a culture's discourses with itself alters.

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