

Post Modernism and Mysticism (In the light of Shah Lateef's Poetry)

Abstract:

Post modernism is neither system nor theory but it is an era, based on new scientific inventions and globalization. Post modernism comes from its rejection of Modern scientific mentality of objectivity and progress associated with enlightenment. One of the main characteristics of postmodern thinking is that the world is seen as much more complex and uncertain place. The Interest in post modernity that has stagnated over the past decade has come to be replaced by a concern with globalization.

Postmodernism and globalization are two sides of the same coin. It is a concept created by USA after fall of USSR. The concept of Globalization was clear in Marxism that scientific high speed technology will create scientific ethos that would be alternate for postmodernism.

The term "Postmodern" begins to make sense if you understand what "Modernism" refers to. In this case, "Modernism" usually refers to Neo-Classical, Enlightenment assumptions concerning the role reason, or rationality, or scientific reasoning, play in guiding our understanding of the human condition and, in extreme cases of postmodern theory, nature itself. Postmodernism basically challenges those basic assumptions. The initiative indications start about postmodernism when **Ferdinand de Saussure** said that word has no meaning. Meaning is assumed by certain type of culture and environment; we are only signifier and signified can be understood by binary oppositions. This theory is called structuralism. In the last of 20th century **Jacques Derrida** announced post structuralism theory that signified, can not be understood by binary positions because there are many concepts attached with a single word. So meaning is only assumption. The word and world has no actual meaning.

The second indication was modern scientific theory of Relativity of Einstein that deep down the universe is random; there is no absolute formula about universe. There is no perfect answer of any question it may be "yes" or may be "no".

Postmodernism uses this theory for Market culture and commercialization. Hence globalization became village of emporium. Every one became a commodity. Reality is no longer fixed or determined. All truth within a post-modern context is relative to one's view point. It is a fiction created from a

scientific point of view only, and not the final truth. This is an uncomfortable viewpoint for many people and there is a great deal of misunderstanding about this idea of postmodernism. This whole situation is called hyper reality. Post-modernism doesn't believe in real or false. On one side truth is also false viewed from another side. According to this statement "God" is not absolute. It means that in post modernity "god" is an invention of the market to dupe the poor's.

Sufis believe in absolute reality. Because there is no concept of peace, worship, compassion, empathy, optimism, and humanism without absolute "truth" if there is no concept of right or wrong, everyone is right doing everything, in sindh Sufis believe in unity in diversity. "Sufi" is a unique word. "Sufi" is a unique Power. It does not relate to any particular religion. It belongs to all of humanity. Therefore Sufism is based on humanism but postmodernism is based on commercialization. Postmodern man is machine without spirituality which is depicted for earning and glamorization. He is surviving for "to have" not to "be". Sufi's man is universal, he has to gain his essence, and he has to "be". Shah Lateef is a genius poet he has explained his version and vision. Shah's Sufism moves around the humanism.

2nd world war caused large scale destruction. Millions lost their lives and were displaced, and suffered physically and psychologically; so much so that man's trust in humanity and society diminished. Meanwhile, existentialists called out: "Existence precedes essence." Not only that, but they, even went a step further and said that the essence didn't exist at all. This meant that man was a pointless being, hence life was reduced to a mere meaningless modality. Before that, Friedrich Nietzsche had proclaimed that god was dead rendering man alone. Therefore, one must become his god, because no help was going to come down. He said that words had no meaning. In that sequence, Ferdinand de Saussure said that the words depend on structures for their meaning. Likewise, words are better understood through their opposites, e.g. night through day, white through black, and good through evil etc. Had there been no opposites, there would not have been any meaningful identification. Roland Barthes introduced the system of Binary Opposites, and went on to say, "The text is tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture."⁽¹⁾ Simply put, author neither creates any text, nor contributes anything totally new. Instead, he rearranges already

available signs and symbols in the surroundings. Announcing 'the death of the author', he said that the author is a renewed personality, and is the product of our society, which in turn, is the product of the capitalist era. Then came Jacques Derrida, who, in his book, "Of Grammatology", offered the theory of 'Deconstruction'. He critiqued Saussure's theory of Binary Opposition, because with that, the concept of 'Signified' cannot be established. For example, through 'day', it is not the 'night' that comes into mind. Instead, it will entail several closely related concepts, e.g. darkness, blackness, loneliness, sleep, barking of dogs, and quietness etc. Therefore, words do not possess any meaning at all. Based on this criticism of the concept of the Binary Opposition, Deconstruction aims at undoing the ages-old current concepts of things. Binary Opposition supports absolute and more concrete connotation of concepts. For example, thinking of 'woman' invokes concepts like, weakness, fragility, sex, pleasure, emotional overwhelm, and idiocy etc. These concepts have underlying biases. Therefore, Deconstruction tries to shatter the shambles of Binary Opposition. However, Deconstruction, also, breaks down inter-relation of things. From this, springs Decentralization, which is feedstock of anarchy.

Vishen Lakhiani, the owner of the Mindvalley Academy, in his book 'The Code of the Extraordinary Mind', has brought all this to a whole new level, without mentioning any of above concepts. He says that we tend take things as others around us choose for us, and we do it unconsciously. This is what he calls 'Culturescape'.⁽²⁾ Quite a few of the rules that society fixes for us are not valid anymore and he calls them 'Brules'. A Brule is a bullshit rule.⁽³⁾

We saw that Construction and Deconstruction have sprung from the land of Existentialism. The common theme of both is that the things have lost their meaning. From this very notion, there comes out the 'Postmodernism'.

Postmodernism does not have a hard and fast definition. However, Joseph Stieglitz maintains that globalization and post modernism are two sides of the same coin.⁽⁴⁾ Nom Chomsky con-

siders globalization as an inevitable ingredient of the American vision. He said that certain parts of post modernization are beyond human intellect.⁽⁵⁾ Some intellectuals take post modernization as the product of modern technology. In that foreground, we can try to understand some basics of post modernization with the help of following words:

Modernization	Post Modernization
Centralization	Decentralization
Ideology	Anarchy
Natural Culture & Nation	Techno-culture
History	History of the day
Truth & lie	Relative truth
Compromise	Win-win

If we think through, we will notice that foundations of Post-modernization are laid upon Decentralization. Real life can only be put together when both spiritual and temporal aspects are taken care of simultaneously, which this system lacks all together. After that, an ideology is the basis of certain centralization. Post-modernization denies ideology, and calls for, "Think globally and act locally." Globalization, in fact, is a post-Soviet slogan. Karl Marx had introduced scientific communism in the wake of the then modern science and technology. Age of the scientific communism has been replaced, 1st with Liberalization, and then with the era of globalization and postmodernism. This suits to and serves the purpose of exploiters and multinational companies.

Post modernization is also indebted to William James, an American who introduced the theory of Functionalism, which was also used by America for its financial interests. Postmodernism makes ample use of the theory of Relativity also. That is, nothing is formulized, and nothing is certain, and one event or action may entail many reactions and post-events. That's why an action may appear to be wrong in one set of circumstances and may seem perfectly okay in another set. This means: World is not formulized, it's random. This means: standards of right and

wrong have grown thinner. Karl Marx had said that nothing was neutral, if one was to win, then other had to lose; one was right and other was wrong. But, postmodernism postulated that both parties could win, i.e. Win-win.

Scientific disciplines grew based on experimentation and intellect. Karl Marx, that's why, deemed objectivity of paramount importance. Human behavior; economic, social, and ethical conditions; are all reflection of objective conditions. But, Postmodernism took a U turn. It takes all activities as the reflection of man's subjective conditions. Stephen Covey had said, "I am not a product of my circumstances. I am product of my decisions."⁽⁶⁾ Simply put, change your thinking, world will change.

Impact of Post Modernism on Sindhi Society:

Sindh is connected with the contemporary world. It is not an isolated entity. When ethics, centralization, or truthfulness etc. (say) slacken from the world, how can Sindh remain replete with them? ----- Does not matter, if we are Sufis. Sindh has been under the influence of Sufis and saints for centuries, but it is connected with the modern world also. To add to that, many a pseudo-issue is also created. Aliens are accommodated in Sindh, resulting in the demise of Sindhi traditions along with uncontrolled and undisciplined 'freedom'. Our media, politicians, feudal lords, government agencies, and so-called intellectuals are equally involved. It is not in the fabric of Sufism to suffer from silence and timidity, if there is injustice and oppression around. Sufi never suggests strangulating inner voice. That's why Shah Lateef said:

"If you want to conquer, then forget about your whims,
Take spears, fight head on, and don't turn your back,
Kill the killer and emerge victor." (SUR KADARO)

During USSR times, democracy connoted to be something different. However, in the post-Soviet era, democracy means uncontrolled & unchecked freedom, and is based on the doctrine of "might is right." That's why Sindh has been divided into pieces

and handed over to chieftains, and feudal lords. Due to exponentially increased decentralization, bigotries based on cults, sects, castes, and creeds have sky-rocketed. Because of the roguery and viciousness of these mighty few, sense of security has slid, and everyone looks towards a 'mighty one' for protection. This has increased the aforesaid bigotry types.

Because of opening of international markets, shops are full of electronic and mechanical gadgets and appliances. Due to low purchasing power of a common men, banks lend money to them. This causes people to be in debt and in life-long depression. Multinational companies extract the wealth out of poor countries rendering them even poorer. Now, the agriculture is also at the mercy of these corporations, because indigenous seeds are getting replaced with high producing hybrid and other seeds, which cannot be reproduced. Same is true for artificial fertilizers and pesticides, which are poisoning the foods, spreading new types of diseases along with adding to the environmental pollution. Sindh, which always have been under the strong influence of Sufism, in now fettered by fanaticism and spell-bound in sectarian sensuality. On the other hand, inhuman infatuation for affluence has caused ethical values to wilt, brotherhood to baseline, and traditions to tilt. Our entire Sindh has been made the midpoint of multiple mafias. This means: Sindh is not a participant in the postmodern era, let alone be a player or a partner.

Postmodernism and Sufism:

It has been quite common in Asia to look at almost everything from religious angle. History, in India and Middle East, mainly comprises religious stories. Culture is also counted in religious rituals. That is why Buddhism, Jainism, Guru Nanak, Bhagti movement, and Vedanta etc. were also considered Hinduism. Likewise, Sufism has been linked with religion. In fact, it has nothing do with any religion. Paradoxically, however, it exists in every religion. Owing to that, quite a few Sufis of 20th century preferred highlighting the universal aspects of the Sufism. One of many such examples is of Hazrat Inayat Khan, who went to the

US from Bombay in 1910 to preach Sufism. He said, "There is an essential unity between the great religions of the world, divine inspiration which comes to humanity from time to time in different forms which is in harmony with the culture of a certain people at a certain time. Different forms but the same truth."⁽⁷⁾

Due to inadequate patronage by intellectual class, Sufism in Sindh restricted to tombs, so-called dervishes and disciples, drug addicts, and shrine cultures. This caused Sufism to appear as a passive philosophy. It was thought that the Sufi is he who is a drug addict, someone with a bread, a disciple of some dervish, or even a beggar. Whereas, this never has been the definition of a Sufi.

An existentialist terms desire as a sign of some lack in the existence. But, a sufi links the longing with the lack in the essence. This has relation with avarice, which means gluttony and greed of getting material gains. He who continues with his caprice and goes on with his gluttony, loses 'love'. He shall neither elevate his spiritual status nor will divine secrets be opened to him. Shah Latif had said:

Deprived they died, didn't dease contended,
Like sparrow that subsists on mealworms,
They were bubbles, in the midst of a vast valley.

(SUR AASA)

Postmodernism has decentralization and anarchy in it, Sufism has centralization and work on self (austerity). Metaphysics of a Sufi is such that the universe is a single unit – just one existence. It has manifested in plurality. Basic essence of every being is same. It is identified through its opposite. For example, a day can be called a day when night exists. Likewise, love through hate, and goodness through Evil. Shah Latif had said:

Don't accompany those, who don't recognize truth,
These are the ones who'd tear priceless stones into halves, and throw them on floor,
Exchange your gems with those, who identify the invalua-

ble. (SUR SARERAAG)

Post structuralism, which is the basic premise of Post-modernism, doesn't have the concept of opposites. This is because they think there can't be a single opposite of anything, there'd be multiple. Therefore, there can't be a signified word. Look at what Derrida has to say:

"The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself essentially and lawfully; every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concept."⁽⁸⁾

In the Sufi metaphysics, man identifies its essence and connects with the unity. But, without essence man is a mere material existence, and possesses greed, selfishness, egotism, and grudge. The essence of the Sufism is 'love', which is the basic moving force of the universe. To get to that, ego and greed must be let gone. Look at following piece of poetry by Shah Latif:

"O seeker! Don't ask for material favors,
They'll detach you by giving you a handful gems."⁽⁹⁾

Sufi is a part of the universality of the Cosmos. Professor Saleem Chishtee, in 'History of Sufism' says, "The biggest thing about Sufism is that its methodology has remained the same in every country and in every era. This is 'love' which connects one human with the other human, and eventually emerges as a man immersed in the eternity."⁽¹⁰⁾ The more the man becomes one with the multitude, the more emptiness he feels inside him. He will try to fill these empty spaces with material objects. He will employ ego to bridge the gaps within but will end up with more emptiness. For such people, Shah Latif has said:

The world boasts of "I"
Doesn't know, it's "He" who has done it all.(KALYAAN)

In the Sufi Meta physics, world is a "matrix". In the post-modernism, world is a hyper reality, in which reality is relative,

not absolute. When there is no concept of reality; attributes like values, humanity, empathy, sympathy, and love become relative. Consequently, man's relation with the world can become based on greed, arrogance, indifference, and even terror. But, sufi reality is not relative, it's absolute, and is manifested in beauty, man, and the world. And, love is the way to get to that, which inspires man's inner powers and joins him with the universal spiritual powers. That's why Shah Latif has said:

World is all river, and only a few are swimmers,
One of the waves is on vanity, the other one is inferno,
Even then the seekers have placed boats.(SUR SARERAG)

The 2nd aspect of the Sufism is humanity. The 'God' of the Sufi is extremely vast, and universe is a construct, and 'He' is in every particle of it. Therefore, every human is above color, race, creed, nationality and other artificial dividing lines. All such differences and dissensions are manifestations of the 'matrix'; otherwise the reality is really the same.

Your manifestations are millions and billions,
They look different to different people,
O love! What else can I say about You.(KALYAAN)

One of the flavors of Sindhi Sufism is such that there is complete social and economic harmony in it. No Sufi, from Shah Karim to Shah Latif, was a hermit. Sufi Shah Inayat was a revolutionary and went on to proclaim: "He who ploughs the land has the right to eat."⁽¹¹⁾ Anyone from any religion or sect can be their student. They do not differentiate between Hindu and Muslim. As Sachal Sarmast says:

"Religions have perplexed people all around,
Religious gurus have extremely misguided them."⁽¹²⁾

Because of decentralization and demise of ideology in postmodernism, world has entered in the state of insanity. Because of that, terrorism has also become rife. There is no forced

facilitation in Sufism, but it offers a moderate and practical way out.

"Fasting and prayer are indeed good deeds,

However, it is something else that enable you to see the Beloved."⁽¹³⁾

Shah Latif is the one who despises hypocrisy. Other than that, Sufism is synonymous to abstinence and treading spiritual path. Even in today's Sindh, Sufi style behaviors are still there. Attributes like, letting things go, forgiveness, humility, and sympathy aren't extinct. Even though, at a times, such qualities have been frowned at, but are important for the serenity of the soul. In today's postmodern world, these are the traits which signify humanity.

In postmodernism, the concepts like Win/win, sometimes, support the wrong side of the equation; and Sufi cannot stand that.

Conclusion:

Postmodernism is complex and intricate and is not easily amenable to definition. Every era has a system or center or story (as per Yuval Noah Harari) or construct (as per Vishen Lakhiani). That system has its own truths and modus operandi. However, in postmodernism, there is no story, no central thought, and no absolute truth. Hence, the end-product, is uncontrolled freedom, which is far worse than the freedom of liberalism.

World, in postmodern era, has become synonymous to greed and gluttony. This is causing insanity and vanity. In this age of crisis of ideologies & 'stories', and when anarchy and insensitivity are order of the day, following piece of poetry of Shah Latif is extremely meaningful:

Don't fuel the fire, don't feed this ferocious,
Put it off once for all, by quenching its flames.

Sufism, as a behavior, is of paramount importance,

which comes with a complete code of Life. Postmodern period has mechanized mankind. Postmodernism has refused to, even, accept absolute concepts of truth and lie, and oppressed and oppressor. Because of that, concept of globalization has chained poor countries in its 'postmodern' style. On top of that, insanity, vanity and greed has plunged humankind deep in the darkness of prehistoric era. In such a time, Sufism searches for humanity, at least attempts to pull it from marshes of material mayhem.

In this era of "might is right", how some characteristics of forgiveness, humility, and letting go, can save frail human and national existence? This question, if comes in the minds of the readers, is totally legitimate and pertinent. When man is mastering the maneuvers to win an unconscious & stupid competition; when he is polluting the environment in return of amassing wealth, and is inevitably inviting floods and famine, viruses and wars; when his insanity has put Homo Sapiens at the risk of getting extinct; a Sufi cannot remain indifferent to his surroundings. The only job of the Sufi is to manifest the 'behavior of humanity'; and, this is the very foundation on which a better 'story', system, or 'construct' can be constructed.

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Note: All the poems of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai has been taken from: "Shah Jo Risalo" compiled by Bhano Khan Sheikh publisher Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai Chair, University of Karachi, 2003.