

CULTURE AND LITERATURE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

A panel discussion at Vichaar Manthan's Sustainable Narratives Conference 2020

by Dinaay Shah

History/definition of postmodernism

The narratives dominating the academic biosphere at present can be summarised under the umbrella term: postmodern. Postmodernism has been articulated as a departure from Modernist thought, generally distrusting the idea of an "objective" truth or reality. Professor Makarand Paranjape opened with remarks on the history and a description of postmodern thought. Professor Paranjape began with remarks on the history of postmodernism, summarising it as the following: the "death of man", that is, the death of the sovereign individual in favour of group identification; the "death of history", best characterised by Karl Marx's proclamation that all of history is a class struggle and finally the death of "grand narratives". This being the deconstruction of meta-narratives such as language and morality. Along with these hallmarks, Prof Paranjape noted the inherent contradiction in the postmodern foundation, that being the claim of being "anti-foundational". These notions were built upon by Amish Tripathi, who claimed that postmodernism is carrying on a tradition of nihilism and Professor Lou Marinoff, who stated postmodernism is a "Trojan Horse" bringing along with it "cultural Marxism".

Postmodernism in India

The postmodern 'culture' has taken the West by storm, but does it have a grasp in India? According to Amish Tripathi, this is not the case and never will be the case. He makes his point by appealing to the Dharmic psychology of the Indian population. This is a manner of thinking that rejects mere dichotomies and is immunised from nihilism as a result. If nihilism is characterised as tearing down all that came before, Amish claimed the Dharmic traditions "build on the shoulder of giants whilst still questioning them". A seeming cognitive dissonance that the populus is able to balance comfortably due to the liberal nature of inquiry inherent in the culture. These traditions also acknowledge the issues of differing truths, much like postmodernism. However, this is resolved by an acknowledgement of the existence of an absolute Truth, which, "only the Gods know" (a phrase which can be used ironically).

CULTURE AND LITERATURE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

by Dinaay Shah

Postmodernism in the West

In response to the question “what has this particular set of memes done to Western culture?”, Lou Marinoff summarised postmodernism as a “Trojan Horse”. As established earlier, since postmodernism heralds a form of “vagueology” (smoke and mirrors), it is easy to bring along cultural Marxism as a solution, despite the fact that Marxism has failed everywhere, in all dimensions. In addition to the promotion of a failed ideology, postmodernism has succeeded in deepening moral divides, Lou stated that the last time the West was truly united in morality was during WW2. Along with a rejection of moral realities, the belief in reality is immature according to the postmodern movement.

What is the remedy?

Amish Tripathi suggested that stories and literature are the vehicles through which philosophies are communicated to a society, and that stories are the route to reform some foundations. Being able to appreciate the complexities and nuances of a story sets us up to do the same for fellow humans and human experience. Makarand Paranjape mirrored this point, claiming that we need to form new sustainable narratives and share each other's stories. Along with this, Makarand suggested a reformulation of the Jungian individuation process, which he called 'atmanisation'. This is a route to transcend the ego, which solves the problem of egoism in the West. Finally, respecting the Guru as a principle, which entails exploring the world beyond dualities and false dichotomies. A common theme in these solutions is to reject simplistic dualities, Lou Marinoff was no different in this view. And he went on to claim that “realising our full human potential as human beings comes from an open heart and an open mind and seeing the world as close as we can to what it is, and not what we have been indoctrinated into believing what it is”.

LEARN, LIVE AND SHARE
HINDU IDEAS