**M.A. Political Science, Second Semester**

**Course No. PLS201[ International Relations : Theories and Issues]**

**Group A**

**Topic – Postmodernism in International Relations**

Postmodernism in international relations is an approach that has been part of International Relations scholarship since the 1980s. Although there are various strands of thinking, a key element of postmodern theory is a distrust of any account of human life which claims to have direct access to the ‘truth’. Postmodern International relations theory criticizes theories like Marxism that provide an overarching metanarrative to history. Key postmodern thinkers include J. F. Lyotard, Michel Focault, and Jacques Derrida. Postmodernism has produced the idea of the ‘power-knowledge’ relationship to criticize the “absolute truth”, which is proposed by positivism and also provides us with different methodologies such as genealogy, text, narrative, discourse, deconstruction, and double reading to explain world politics.

Until the1980s, most scholars of international relations tended to be positivists. Buy since then, positivism has been under attack. Such dissent prominently contains Feminism, CriticalTtheory, Post-colonialism, Post-Structuralism and **Postmodernism.** Their common idea is that they all view the world as something external to the International Relations theory. Postmodernism is the term used by sociologists and others to describe a way of thinking that has becoming pervasive in the Western world during the last twenty-five years. It is an approach to reality that is having a significant effect on architecture, art, education, law, literature, psychotherapy, science, theatre, and the study of history and people’s view of religion.It entered in International relations theory in the mid-1980s, but can only be said to have really arrived in the past twenty years. The term “postmodern” first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979 with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by Lyotard. Other significant postmodern thinkers are De Man, Geoffrey Hartman and Jurgen Habermas. Postmodernists who have made significant contributions to International relations theory are Richard Ashley, Der Derian, David Campbell, and William Connolly.

In the past the study of international relations has been dominated by four main theories – Liberalism, Realism, Marxism and Constructivism. However, during the last two decades there has been a dramatic change to this picture. A range of new approaches has developed to help understand the nature of world politics. In the context of globalization, Realism seems inadequate to explain issues like the rise of non-state actors, identity politics, transnational social movements, and information technology. Thus the picture of International Relations theory has changed, and a series of alternative approaches has emerged as more relevant to world politics in the 21st century.

Until today there is no apt definition of “postmodernism”. It appears to be so open a theory that not even its advocates can agree upon how to define it. Lyotard defined it as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives and essentialism’.

Postmodernists emphasize the power-knowledge relationship and criticize the notion dominant in rationalist theories and positivism that knowledge is irrelevant to the working of power. They also oppose the existence of ‘absolute truth’. Following Foucalt, the postmodern international relations scholars argue that no truth exists outside power. They use Foucalt’s approach of ‘genealogy’ to register and expose the significance of history in the light of the relationship between power and knowledge. Postmodernists apply the genealogy approach to doubt the ‘unity’ and “centrality” of national identity, and explain how the existing appearance of unity and centrality is not natural, but artificially constructed. Richard Devetak, an International Relations scholar, has stated that “different configurations of power and knowledge give rise to different conceptions of sovereignty, statehood, and intervention”. Postmodernists focus on counter-histories; they emphasize the existence of multi-histories and not just the one ‘grand-history’.

Postmodernism emerged as a reaction to the methodology led by positivists and rationalists. Some scholars have argued that postmodernism does not have anything significant to contribute to the theorization of International Relations. They further state that ithas led International Theory into ‘chaos’. But this is an oversimplification. In fact, postmodernism effectively provides many different ways of explaining and understanding systems of world politics. Postmodernists criticize the statement proposed by positivists and rationalists that power and knowledge are irrelevant. They present the ‘power-knowledge’ relationship to let us understand that power in fact produces knowledge, and they also propose the idea that there is no existence of absolute truth. From the postmodern perspective, there is always more than one tryth existing in an event.

For the last twent tears, Postmodernists have provided important methodologies that may enable us to better analyze contemporary political issues. Postmodernism plays an important role in the

theorization of International Relations, especially since economic structures, media, political and diplomatic systems have evolved into completely different forms from what they used to be, and they can no longer be easily analysed by traditional theories of InternationalRelations.

**Key Words:** Postmodernism, Power-Knowledge relationship, Absolute truth, Metanarrative, Genealogy, Deconstruction, Positivism, Rationalism.

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