



An Evaluation of Derrida's Deconstruction

¹Author Pooja Phukan

ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED 20 DECEMBER 2023

ACCEPTED 5 JUNE 2024

PUBLISHED 31 AUGUST 2024

ABSTRACT

In this paper the author attempted to explore Jacque Derrida's concept of Deconstruction. Jacque Derrida was a prominent philosopher who is mostly recognized as the exponent of deconstruction. Derrida was basically an Algerian born French Philosopher. His deconstruction theory is not just a philosophy or literary argumentation but a theory for the improvement of common people in their basic lifestyle. This theory teaches people to re-generate, re- build previously existing ideologies in their own beneficial way. Jacque Derrida is against of fixed meanings and fixed ideologies. Rather he promotes changes and multiplicity in each and every object. As according to Derrida it is impossible to give fixed meaning to anything, it is impossible to elaborate Derrida's deconstruction theory in a fixed way too. This paper will primarily discuss about Derrida's attempt to elaborate what his notion of Deconstruction actually mean and how it works in practical life. While doing this study both descriptive and analytic Method of research is used.

Keywords:

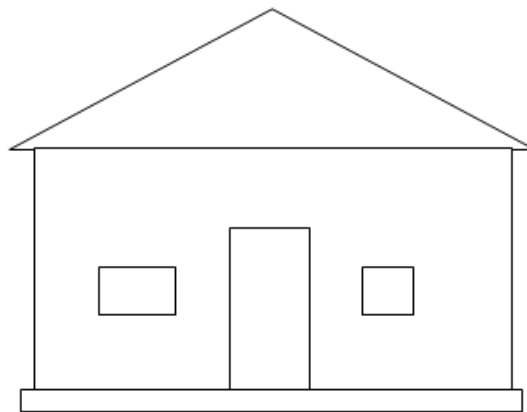
Deconstruction, Structuralism, Difference, Binary opposition, Signifier, Signified.

¹ Corresponding Author : Ex-student, Centre for studies in Philosophy, Dibrugarh University
Email – phukonpooja8@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Jacque Derrida was one of the most famous, controversial, but also a wise figure in recent French intellectual life. He invented a way of doing Philosophy that he called as 'Deconstruction', which fundamentally made a structural change in peoples mind in understanding of many academic fields, especially literary studies. Derrida was born in 1930, in El Bier, which is a suburb of Algeria. As an introduction to Derrida's Deconstruction, it is important to mention that his 'Deconstruction' is relatable to 'Post-structuralism', or can say Derrida was a post- structuralism philosopher because these both concepts are reactions against structuralism.

Here as the motive of this paper is to discuss Derrida's 'Deconstruction', the first duty is to get a clear concept about what the term 'Deconstruction' etymologically means. The word Deconstruction is made up of two words. One is 'De' and the other is 'Construction'. The word construction literally means build-up something. Now according to Derrida Deconstruction means, firstly break the construction and then re-build it. It will be more understandable with a pictorial form of an example;



This picture is of a house. This is a construction of a house. Now this construction is made up of bricks, sand, cement etc. Now when someone says that he/she is applying Deconstruction theory to this house, it basically means that he/she is going to break



this house first and he/she is going to find what is there which he/she don't see in before made construction and then re-build it.

This example is just to making it simple to understand the word Deconstruction, because it is important to know the etymological meaning before reaching to philosophical interpretation.

This paper will basically explain Derrida's interpretation of deconstruction in against of structuralism. According to Derrida's philosophy there is nothing exist as fix, even a single word has no single meaning for all. There is no universal structure present for any object. Therefore according to him it is important to deconstruct each and everything to gets it proper essence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

As mentioned above the primary aim of this research paper is to understand Jacque Derrida's concept of Deconstruction, which will follow the below details as well.

- 1) Simplifying the Philosophy behind Derrida's Deconstruction.
- 2) What Deconstruction means in linguistics?
- 3) How Derrida explains his theory as a response to structuralism?
- 4) How Deconstruction works in various fields apart from linguistics?

METHODOLOGY

While preparing this research paper the author uses both descriptive and analytic method. Also the data used in this paper is based on secondary sources like books, research articles, and internet sources.



ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the very first of the discussion about 'Deconstruction', it is quite disappointing but a honest statement from the author of this paper is that anybody who tries to tell that they are going to define deconstruction, or they are going to tell you what deconstruction is in its exact meaning, if someone find such kind of person than it will be better to run away from him. Deconstruction is not that easy task and nobody claim that they can define deconstruction as a whole. Even Jacque Derrida who has developed deconstruction could not define it fully. People can discuss what all are involved in Deconstruction, they can discuss various aspects of Deconstruction, they can see how Derrida use Deconstruction as a theory. But it is not something which can be defined in strict terms.

However with so much courage, the author of this paper trying to present this theory and trying to articulate a brief concept about Deconstruction which is basically a Philosophical linguistic theory of Derrida.

The reason behind Derrida's Deconstruction theory:

Before discussing Deconstruction it is essential to know what is Derrida's approach to Philosophical discussion and what is he criticizing or denying at the time of giving his own philosophy, which makes him one of the most liberating and democratic proponents of that time. At that time when colonial power ruled over in Derrida's country, Derrida had to face so much discrimination and racism. As he belongs to Jewish community, therefore he suffered a lot from French dictatorship. This policy is called 'Anti-Semitism'. Derrida was even got out from his school as he is from Jewish community. Derrida thought that the western people made consider themselves as superior gave the status of inferior to others. Derrida wants to refute this system. He says that in hierarchy, they have given the supreme position to whiteness and put other



racist in lower position. Derrida thought that they have to deconstruct that structure. Derrida himself said that the idea behind Deconstruction was to deconstruct the workings of strong nation state, with powerful immigration of politics. This point to be noted that in which time Derrida wrote about Deconstruction was very difficult than today's time. Today institutions have multiple fractured and democratized to an extent and became much more complicated. But in the 1960s the second biggest institution in the world the 'US Army' was fighting a largely unjust war in Vietnam.

Derrida's Deconstruction is not only Philosophy but also a matter of Literature:

Derrida's deconstruction theory is not only a subject matter of Philosophy or not only a subject matter of Philosophy. Sociology, history, anthropology, psycho-analysis and other disciplines also read about Derrida's deconstruction. Now what is already discussed is its philosophical and social aspect. In the next its literary aspect is the central.

Literature aspect of Deconstruction:

In 1966, Derrida gave a lecture at the John Hopkins University. The title of that lecture is 'Structure, Sign and play in the discourse of human science'. There he says that, there is no fixed meaning in any literature or in any writings. Suppose a writer wrote a book, now what he had in his mind, when he wrote the book, what he wrote in his book and what we understood from this book, are three different things. For this reason when a person read a book he can't say that he understood the whole concept what the writer wrote in his/her book.

We can apply it in practical life too. When a person read one book for the first time, he can't understand the whole book because it is people's common character that they left those things which they can't understand. So Derrida was stated that people have



to understand those things also. Only after that people come to know what the writer try to say in his book. It is more understandable when we will know Ferdinand De Saussure's sign and structuralism and how Derrida interpret it by his deconstruction.

Saussure's structuralism and Derrida's interpretation to it:

Saussure was a linguistic philosopher. He has give the theory of sign and structure. He said that every language has a particular structure. He defined sign in two parts-

- 1) Signifier
- 2) Signified

Suppose, a person utters a word 'apple', now when a person listen the word apple and the image made in his mind is the 'signified', on the other hand the word which the person utters is 'Signifier'. The word apple is here just an example, there are lots of sign, lots of signifier and lots of signified in this world.

Saussure said that every word have it's one meaning, one structure as like when someone speak the word 'apple', an image made in his mind. According to Saussure this is a fixed structure. Jacque Derrida rejects this structural approach of Saussure. According to Derrida, when a person utters the word 'apple', it is not compulsory that the image of apple came to each and everyone's mind. Let's assume that, in different language the name of apple may be different, it is not possible that all people in the world know this fruit in the name of apple or may be the utter the word 'apple' for some other fruits or may be in there language apple is not a name given to a fruit. Then how could it be said that every word has its own definite meaning.

Let's take another example – take the word 'suffer'. In English the word 'suffer' means pain but when someone utters it in Hindi language then it means 'a journey'. The utterance of the word is same but its meaning is totally different in two different languages. Derrida say's that language is an open system. There is no full-stop in



language which is said to be the fixed meaning of the word or the fixed structure to it. People have to be always on analytic mood for each and every object of this world because every time they analyze an object, it gives them a new idea. Just assume that a person read a text-book today. There is no doubt that he can understand that book today, but when he again read that book 10 years later, than he will get again something new in that book. This will happen because his thinking capacity will develop in these 10 years. It is not like that the book will change, but his thinking capacity will change for sure. In these contexts Derrida want to states that the notions which people set in their minds like- this only is right, this only is perfect etc, people actually have to re-analyze, re-examine these notions. People have to find out what is good or bad for them in that relevant time. They should use deconstruction in this regards. People don't have to sit fix in something, they need to take the opportunity to come and find out the new things.

Things change with times:

People assume something about a particular object by observing that object just for a few seconds. But according to Derrida this is not the correct way to judge an object. There are so many things to understand whom it may take more than a year. They may be little things or may be big. Even in science also there are so many unsolved things for whose the research is still going on. Derrida therefore says that it is not good to come to conclusion in a minimum time, because things change with times. People have to deconstruct it to understand. Then only they can come to the conclusion.

Language is not the union of signifier and signified:

For Derrida language does not consists only the union of signifier and signified, it only consist signifiers. To explain this, Derrida gave a new term "Differance". This is a French term. Derrida uses this term to explain the relationship between text and meaning.



Derrida combines the French words 'To differ' and 'To defer' to coin the word differance. According to Derrida the differance between structuralism and deconstructionism's approach of text and its meaning is that-

- 1) In structuralism, Language is- Signifier + Signified.
- 2) In Deconstructionism, Language is- Signifier + Signifier.

Binary Opposition:

To explore the specific ways in which language determines our experience, Derrida borrowed and transformed structuralism idea that people too conceptualize their experience in terms of opposition is called 'Binary opposition'. For example, according to structuralism people understood the word 'boy' by contrasting it with the word 'girl'. Similarly people understand the reason/rationality as the opposition of emotion, masculine as the opposite of feminine, civilized as the opposite of primitive and so on. However Derrida noted that these binary oppositions are also little hierarchies that there is one term in the pair is always privileged and consider superior to others.

Deconstructing Human-identity:

Derrida's Deconstruction asserts that peoples experience of themselves and the world is produced by the language they speak, and because all language is an unstable, ambiguous force fields of competing ideologies don't have an identity because the 'identity' implies that people consist of one singular self but they are still multiple and fragmented consisting at any moment of any number of conflicting beliefs, desires, fears, anxieties and intentions.

As an example, Most of the people are very different people on the job, at the store, on a date, or alone in front of the television and even if someone confined his/her investigations to his/her experiences of themselves on the job they will see that their experiences are changing day by day, sometimes from hour to hour or minute to



minute, as they encounter different people or as various thoughts, memories and emotions occurs.

Deconstructing a text:

For deconstructionism, language is a dynamic, ambiguous and unstable, continuously disseminating possible meaning. There are basically two main purposes in deconstructing a literary text-

- 1) To reveal the text's Un- decidability.
- 2) To reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed.

According to Derrida this goal can be accomplished in brief, by the following procedures-

- 1) Note down all the various interpretation of character, events, images and so on- the text seems to offer.
- 2) Show the ways in which these interpretation conflict with one another.
- 3) Show how these conflict procedures still more interpretations, which produce still more conflicts.

Derrida and un-decidability a text:

According to Derrida, un-decidability does not mean that the reader is unable to choose among possible interpretations. Also it does not means that the text can't make up its mind as what it wants to say. Rather un-decidability means that reader and text are inextricably bound within languages. Dissemination of meaning, that is reader and text are interwoven threads and they working together in the loom of language. Specific meanings are just 'moments' of meanings that give inevitable way to more meanings.

CONCLUSION

When Derrida gave deconstruction theory, various western Philosophers criticizes it by



saying it as Ineffective, Fruitless, Biased etc. Many of philosophers even reject this theory.

The main criticism to Derrida's deconstruction is that this theory is too much abstract that it becomes so hard to understand. Fellow Philosophers of Derrida even stated that it is impossible to fully understand his theory of Deconstruction. Well, after this statement of fellow Philosophers critics argue that if it is not possible to fully understand this theory than how its implication is possible? But after passing of time, scholars come to understand the importance of not believing in any fix point and re-arrangement and re-ordering started to give them fruitful results in each and every field, then only they come to realize the importance of this abstract theory and from that time Philosophers are engaged in simplifying Deconstruction for its more fruitful implication in the future. Today people read Derrida as father of 'Deconstruction', and also read 'Deconstruction' as an important theory.

As the objectives of this paper is also to make Deconstruction theory of Derrida is understandable in simple way therefore the author of this paper use simple language and tries to avoid typical abstract style of philosophical articles. The another objectives of this paper to elaborate the usage of Deconstruction theory in other fields also get justifiable space in the article as the author discusses its implications in various fields like philosophical, social, political and lingual with utmost spirit.

This theory teaches us that nothing is fixed and no one can definitely describe anything of the universe. This theory suggests that multiple interpretations are possible to one single thing. This interpretation of Derrida will lead to a more open minded scenario in the society in future. We can dreamt of a more fluid and dynamic compatibility in the society when it becomes possible to spread this theory to the root level of the society, when people stop sitting back with the belief of absolute universal reality, but comes out with strength to reinterpret their surroundings with their own unique way.

At last from the above discussion we can come to a conclusion that, Derrida's Deconstruction theory is not an object of literature or philosophy only. Derrida does



not consider it from these aspects only. Common people can apply it in many aspects of their day to day life. As a fellow belongs to Philosophy the author of this paper consider it as her duty to promote this common man theory among people in simple language.

REFERENCES

1. Alombert, A. (n.d.). From Derrida's Deconstruction to Stiegler's Organology: Thinking after postmodernity. *Derrida Today*, 13(1), 33-47. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2020.0218>
2. Critchley, S. (1992). *The Ethics of Deconstruction : Derrida and Levinas*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA57261799>
3. Derrida: deconstruction from phenomenology to ethics. (1999). *Choice Reviews Online*, 36(10), 36-5611. <https://doi.org/10.5680/choice.36-5611>
4. Derrida, J. (2020). *Deconstruction in a nutshell*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1198zt6>
5. Derrida, J., Patton, p., & Smith, T. (2001). *Jacques Derrida: deconstruction engaged : the Sydney seminars*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA77983504>
6. Dowling, L. H., & Staten, H. (1985). Wittgenstein and Derida. *Rocky Mountain Reviw of Language and Literature*, 39(4), 300. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1347486>
7. Flores, R., & Sallis, J. (1988). *Deconstruction and Phiosophy: The texts of Jacques Derrida*. *Sub-stance*, 17(3), 73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3684932>
8. Silverman, H. J. (n.d.). *Derrida and Deconstruction*. Routledge eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203168998>
9. Trifnas, P. P., & Peters, M. A. (2003). *Derrida, deconstruction and education : ethics of pedagogy and research* . <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA67200145>
10. Wolfreys, J. (1998). *Deconstruction .Derrida*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26618-0>