UNIT 2 STRUCTURALISM

Structure

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2.0 OBJECTIVE

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- to explain what is structuralism;
- to understand the historical development of structuralism;
- to explain the various debates within the theory of structuralism; and
- to understand the strengths and drawbacks of structuralism as a theory.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will have a detailed discussion on the theory of structuralism with regard to understanding and explaining culture and folklore. Structuralism has been one of the most influential theories in the study of culture and folklore. Structuralism had its origin in the discipline of linguistics. However, it eventually made forays into the domains of literary criticism, sociology of literature, aesthetic theory, social sciences, and indeed folklore. In structuralist method, the understanding of objects is relational rather than substantial. The principal feature of the structuralist method is that it takes as its object of investigation a 'system', i.e., the reciprocal relations among a set of facts, rather than particular facts considered in isolation.

The linguistically-oriented discourse of structuralism came to the forefront of the French intellectual scene in the 1960s. Structuralists applied structural-linguistic concepts to the human sciences which they attempted to re-establish on a more rigorous basis. The structuralists deployed holistic analyses that explained phenomena in terms of parts and wholes, defining a structure as the interrelation of parts within a common system. Structures were governed by

unconscious codes or rules, as when language constituted meaning through a differential set of binary opposites, or when mythologies codified eating and sexual behaviour according to systems of rules and codes.

2.2 STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

Let us now begin with what is structural linguistics. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1858-1916) is recognized as the founding father of the structuralist method. His views on the new method of studying linguistics are expounded in his seminal work Course in General Linguistics (1916). Four of his seminal ideas are especially relevant here:

Firstly, he sees language as a social system that was coherent, orderly and susceptible to understanding and explanation as a whole. Syntax and semantics together constitute a group of rules imposed on individuals, and to which individual thought must be submitted if it seeks expression to systems of rules and codes.

Structural analysis focuses on the underlying rules which organised phenomena into a social system, analysing such things as totemic practices in terms of divisions between the sacred and profane in traditional societies, or cuisine in modern societies in terms of culinary rules.

Secondly, de Saussure points out the arbitrariness of the verbal sign, the signifier, which being conventional supposes neither an intrinsic rapport with the concept which constitutes its signification, the signified, nor in consequence any inherent stability with it.

Thirdly, de Saussure makes a significant distinction between, on the one hand, langue, the institution of language, and on the other hand, parole, or the particular and individual acts of linguistic expression.

Fourthly, de Saussure views the structures as entirely independent of history (diachrony). A diachronic approach to the study of a language involves an examination of its origins, development, history and change. In contrast, he opts for a synchronic approach which entails the study of a linguistic system in a particular state, without reference to time.

He further mentions that there are two dimensions in the relationship of words: a) the syntagmatic or 'horizontal' relations; b) the associative or 'vertical' relations, more usually described as paradigmatic. By this distinction he means that each word has a linear relationship, i. e., syntagmatic, with the words that may go before it and come after it. For example, in the sentence 'the batsman hit the ball to the boundary' there is a perceptible relationship between each word. The paradigmatic relationship entails a consideration of the fact that each word in, say, a sentence (like the one above) has a relationship with other words that are not used but are capable of being used - and by being capable are thus associated. Obvious associative words in this instance would be pads, gloves, bat, bowler- or even the whole concept of cricket. Thus, the syntagmatic is concerned with combination; the paradigmatic with substitution. (Cuddon 1977 (1992): 946)

After de Saussure, it is noteworthy to mention the explorations of the schools of Prague and Copenhagen. Scholars such as Roman Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Louis

Hjelmslev, etc. of these schools made significant contributions to the structuralist approach. More recently, Noam Chomsky makes another contribution to structural theory which is of importance in linguistics. He makes a distinction between 'surface structures' and 'deep structures'. A surface structure consists of the collection of words and sounds that we articulate and hear in a sentence; a deep structure is the abstract and underlying structure in a sentence. Two sentences may have the same structure at the surface level (e.g., John is easy to please; John is eager to please), yet they have different meanings because their deep structures are different. The underlying or deep structure thus regulates the meaning. He further makes a distinction between what he calls 'competence' and 'performance'. 'Competence' denotes a person's knowledge of his or her language and its rules (grammar, syntax, etc.), while 'performance' denotes individual and specific utterance.

Check your progress 1

Note: 1) Your answer should be about 300 words;

2) You may check your answer with the possible answer given at the end of the Unit.

1. What are the four seminal ideas of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure?

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2.3 LÉVI-STRAUSS' STRUCTURALISM

The name of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908), the celebrated French anthropologist, is inextricably linked with the wide popularity that structuralism gained in the domain of social sciences, especially cultural anthropology and folklore. His article 'Social Structure' (1963 (1993): 277-323) is the most abstract statement of his theoretical approach. He holds that social structure has nothing to do with reality, but with models built after it. The best model is the one which accounts for all the facts.

Lévi-Strauss' concept of model formation is influenced by structural linguistics. He uses the de Saussurean dichotomies between:

a) langue and parole

b) paradigmatic and syntagmatic

c) code and message (a spoken language is a code and its message is its substance. In the realm of sign, one's facial expression is a code giving message.) Each society has its own code to transmit a particular message or substance. But there are many other kinds of codes. Each such code is a language and the sum of all such codes is the culture.

d) synchrony and diachrony.

Lévi-Strauss develops his model using these dichotomies in order to examine 'social reality'. His studies on kinship and totemism, two domains of social reality,

using the structuralist method yielded much newer insights into the idea of social structure and the role of human actors therein. However, here we will confine our discussion only to the application of structuralist method to the study of myth, and to examine as to how human mind work through myth.

2.4 STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MYTH

Lévi-Strauss felt that because myth had no practical function, it could reveal the working of the mind at a deeper level. The meaning of a myth cannot be determined simply from listening to its telling, its surface characteristics. In a fashion parallel to language and grammatical law, myth creators are only partially or intermittently aware of structures of myth. Lévi-Strauss shows not how humans think in myth but how myths operate in human minds, without their being aware of that fact.

He contends that myths have the same linear structure through time as language. Like language, a myth can be segmented into constituent units and these units analyzed in relation to each other. These constituent units or mythemes can be found at the sentence level. Lévi-Strauss further contends that the true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning.

In this usage, myth has no location in chronological time. A myth is akin to fairytales and dreams, especially in the complete absence of nature-culture distinction. Nevertheless, myths and fairytales are meaningful. As we cannot write lexicon without grammar, without structure also we cannot decipher meaning. As a follower of Freud's psycho-analysis he believed that the meaning of folktales/myths is hidden.

Following Freud's analysis of dreams, Lévi-Strauss states myth to be a code, hidden behind the sense which the myth makes at face value. This message in code can be interpreted to reveal the hidden meaning. Then what is the nature of this hidden meaning?

Firstly, all myths present resolutions to contradictions that are inherently irresolvable. Lévi-Strauss states that as we decode myth we see repeatedly that the hidden meaning has to do with unwelcome, uncomfortable contradictions which plague all human societies.

Secondly, myths contain concrete messages passed on from 'senders' (not very clear who is sending, but we may think of the ancestors or the senior members of the society as 'senders') to 'receivers' (clearly the younger generation which must be indoctrinated by the bearers of the tradition). Let us represent the 'senders' as A and 'receivers' as B. Now if an individual A who is trying to pass a message to a friend B who is almost out of earshot and if the communication is further hampered by various kinds of interference noise from wind, passing cars and so on, what will A do? If he is sensible, he will not be satisfied with shouting his message just once, he will shout it several times, and give a different wording to the message each time, supplementing his words with visual signals. At the receiving end B may very likely get the meaning of each of the individual messages slightly wrong, but when he puts them together the redundancies and the mutual consistencies and

inconsistencies will make it quite clear what is 'really' being said. Suppose, for example, that the intended message get obliterated by interference from other noises then the total pattern of what B receives will consist of a series of 'chords' as in an orchestra score (see below).(Leach 1970: 59)

Lévi-Strauss says that it is not via one myth that a message is passed to the 'receiver'. The entire corpus of myth of a particular community as a single whole passes on the message. Lévi-Strauss here compares this corpus to an orchestra score. Myths and music are alike in being languages that transcend spoken-about experience and unfold in time. They both have syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures. The syntagmatic structure of music is found in relations of contiguity such as the A/B/A structure of sonata form. The syntagmatic structure of music creates melody - the lineal arrangement of notes that unfold through time when the score is played. The paradigmatic structure, which is the simultaneity of notes, creates the harmony. The sequences of each myth are treated as the instrumental parts of a musical work; to be studied as one study a symphony. Suppose the above-mentioned corpus has 8 myths and in each generation some parts of these myths are either not passed on or passed on in an incomplete way. Then the pattern received will look like this:

only as an entire	1	2		4			7	8	
corpus (score)		2	3	4		6		8	
do the myths	1			4	5		7	8	*-series of chords*
pass on the	1	2			5		7		*of an orchestra*
message			3	4	5	6		8	*score*

Lévi-Strauss' claims that a corpus of mythology constitutes an 'orchestra score' like the above. The collectivity of senior members of a society, through its religious institutions, is unconsciously transmitting to the junior members a basic message which is manifest in the 'score' as a whole rather than in any particular myth. (Leach, ibid: 60)

Lévi-Strauss analyses the famous Oedipus myth in the essay, 'The Structural Study of Myth' included as a chapter in his celebrated book Structural Anthropology (Vol. I: 1963, 1993)). Although this appears to be a myth about incest, Lévi-Strauss' analysis reveals that its real meaning deals with a human dilemma: born from one or born from two? All humans derive from a mother and a father, but almost all cultures deny one or the other, claiming that the child belongs solely to the mother's side or solely to the father's side. Born from two is a characteristic that differentiates humans from monsters and gods. When the constituting units (mythemes) of the Oedipus myth which are presented in a syntagmatic order are paradigmatically organized, the real meaning of the myth emerge revealing its deep structure.(for a detailed analysis of the Oedipus myth refer to Levi-Strauss' essay, 'The Structural Study of Myth' cited above)

Interpreting the meaning of the Oedipus myth, Lévi-Strauss contends that the myth actually has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous, to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of men and women. Although the problem obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which relates the original problem - born from one or born from two? - to the derivative problem : born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations

is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure.(ibid: 216)

Criticisms

Lévi-Strauss' structuralism has been subjected to several criticisms. His approach is based on the hypothetical existence of an unconscious meaning of cultural phenomena. Since cultural meaning is hidden, it can not be deciphered by empirical study. Thus Lévi-Strauss seems to be more concerned with the unconscious, rather than the conscious meaning. His firm belief in the Freudian concepts that 'conscious data is always erroneous and illusory' is an exaggeration. Nor is it true that everything unconscious is the 'real motor' of the mind, and everything conscious merely a relatively unimportant side issue. Besides, he does not tell us as to a] how do the myths survive, and b] how do they get perpetuated functionally irrespective of the changes that have occurred to mankind. Last but not the least, Lévi-Strauss' model of structure has come under criticism as being basically static in nature. It does not take the change factor into account.

Check your progress 2

Note: 1) Your answer should be about 300 words;

2) You may check your answer with the possible answer given at the end of the Unit.

2) What are the main criticisms of Lévi-Strauss' structuralism?

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2.5 STRUCTURALISM OF VLADIMIR PROPP

Though the structural approach emerged very influential in the 1960s, a real beginning of structural approach in folkore, however, appeared in the late 1920s when the Russian Formalist Vladimir J. Propp's (1895-1970) seminal book Morfologija Skazki (Morphology of the Folk--tale, 1958) was published in 1928. Propp was a professor of Russian and Comparative Folklore at the Leningrad University. He introduced and taught the courses which spoke of Russian Formalist thinking and its philosophy of analysis. But his book came to limelight only when it was translated into English in 1958. Such a neglect of his book was attributed to the condemnation of the formalist thinking and importance attached to diachronic (historical) perspective in the study of folklore in Russia. It is to be noted that Propp's book was written from synchronic perspective. But after its English publication, the book received wide acclaim. It shook the foundations of the contemporary atomistic and diachronic approaches in the study of oral narratives. It is noteworthy that it was the Prague Linguistic Circle which took

the initiative to spread the ideas of Propp and around 1940 Roman Jakobson took special initiative in establishing Propp's analysis inside American academia.

Propp's syntagmatic approach

Propp's method of analysing fairytales can be compared to that brand of linguistic structuralism which thrives on formalistic thought and ignores semantics in favour of syntax. This method pays exclusive attention to the rules that govern the construction of statements of any tale. Propp stresses the need to describe a given folkloric phenomenon before one is tempted to discover the origin of that phenomenon because one can speak about the origin of any phenomenon only after that phenomenon has been described.

Propp discovers that many Russian folktales and fairytales have the one and the same underlying story. In his Morphology he tries to show how a hundred different tales are in fact variations of the one and same underlying structure (i.e. the straight forward accounting or the bare bones of a story devoid of the details).

But the question arises as to how one and the same structure is possible if in some fairytales we have characters who play important roles - a prince, a fairy, a queen - and who are yet wholly absent from others. Again, how if certain actions lead to disaster in some tales while in others it brings rich rewards? How could all these tales possibly be presentations of the same basic story? (Bretens 2001: 37).

For explaining these questions Propp works out an analytical approach which he calls 'morphological'. It means "a description of the (Russian fairy) tale according to its component parts and the relation of these components to each other and the whole." Component parts imply such elements of fairy tales which remain same everywhere and therefore constants unlike the elements which change from one tale to another tale, i.e. variables (e.g. the characters or objects of fairy tales). It is to be noted that before the method of Propp became popular, folklore analysis was mainly guided by these variables. Propp holds that it is not characters (dramatis personae) but their constant actions or functions that form the basic elements or the component parts of tales. However, all actions do not qualify to become functions or constant elements. Only those elements which have implication in the progress of the plots of the tale are to be regarded as such. So, Propp devises a method by which one can study the tales according to the functions of the characters (dramatis personae). Thus, function becomes the basic classificatory and analytical unit. How does then he discover these functions? Following are the sentences drawn from Propp (1968 (1998): 19-20):

a) A tsar gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero to another kingdom.

b) An old man gives Sucenko a horse. The horse carries Sucenko away to another kingdom.

c) A sorcerer gives Ivan a little boat. The boat takes Ivan to another kingdom.

d) A princess gives Ivan a ring. Young men appearing out of the ring carry Ivan into another kingdom, and so forth.

In the above sentences, what is common/constant is the Function of Giving. Ring, horse, eagle, boat, etc. are variables. The names of the dramatis personae, their attributes and other qualities change, but not their functions. Thus, we can

see that the dramatis personae are variables and their functions constants. From this, Propp drew the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. Therefore, a tale can be studied according to the functions of the dramatis personae.

Propp studies Afanas'ev's celebrated collection of 100 Russian Fairy Tales and found 31 functions that can account for the totality of the data of 100 tales or the entire genre of fairy tales. He arranges these 31 morphological elements in the "chronological order of the linear sequences...Thus, if a tale consists of elements A--Z, the structure of the tale is delineated in terms of this same sequence" (Dundes 1968: xi) and therefore sometimes called 'syntagmatic' or 'given' analytic schema.

Criticisms

Propp's method of analysis pays exclusive attention to the rules which govern the construction of statements, which is only typical of a formalist. By doing so, he ignored the fact that there is no language which can be deduced from syntax. For understanding/analysis of oral tradition, morphology is sterile unless ethnographic observation, direct or indirect comes to fertilize it. Propp's formalist dichotomy which distinguishes between form and content defining them antithetically, is not imposed by true nature of things, but by the accidental choice he has made for a realm where only form remains while content is abandoned.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Propp's method of analysis also does not address the questions as to why myths are created, how do they survive and get perpetuated. However, Propp's analysis tells us very clearly about the morphology of tales, the morphological combinations construed as building blocks of tales (like the syntax rules in languages), their finite nature, and the conditions under which these operate. It also tells us about the universality of folklore structure. But it does not tell us why tales are created in the first place; what functions they perform in a given society, why the building blocks get grouped and regrouped in different tales; and finally why it is that in some cultures some building blocks seem more important than the others. Alan Dundes (1968: xiii) comments, "(T)he problem is Propp made no attempt to relate his extraordinary morphology to Russian (or Indo-European) culture as a whole. Clearly structural analysis is not an end in itself! Rather it is a beginning, not an end. But the form must ultimately be related to the culture or cultures in which it is found. In this sense, Propp's study is only a first step, albeit a giant one. For example, does not the fact that Propp's last function is a wedding indicate that Russian Fairytale structure has something to do with marriage? Is the fairy tale a model of fantasy, to be sure, in which one begins with an old nuclear family (cf. Propp's typical initial situation 'the members of a family are enumerated' or Function 1, 'one of the members of a family is absent from home') and ends finally with the formation of a new family (Function 31, 'The Hero is married and ascends the throne')? Whether it is so or not, there is no reason in theory why the syntagmatic structure of folktales can not be meaningfully related to other aspects of culture.' However, even Propp's model helps us to understand meaning. The sheer fact that some elements are present in some folktales and absent in others explains that some elements are important for some society and not for others."

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answer should be about 300 words;

2) You may check your answer with the possible answer given at the end of the Unit.

3) What do you understand by Propp's syntagmatic approach?

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2.6 STRUCTURAL METHODS OF PROPP AND LÉVI-STRAUSS: A COMPARISON

At this stage, a brief comparative note between the structuralist methods of Propp and Lévi-Strauss may be made. Propp's method is known as the formalist method. That is, his analysis separates form from the content and puts more emphasis on the former. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss's method is concerned with structured meaning in myths. That is, the content of a myth is embedded in its form and thus they are inseparable. Then Propp's analysis is based on the Russian fairy tales while that of Lévi-Strauss is based on myths. Lastly, Propp's method does not alter the 'syntax' of a tale. It is concerned only with deciphering its morphology (functions of its characters) and the combinations as it is 'given' by the informant. That is why, Propp's method is also known as Syntagmatic structural analysis. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss believes that the content of a myth comprehended in a logical organization can not lie on the given structure and therefore needs 'Rearrangement' by reducing the structural components to meaningful paradigms. Hence, his approach is also called Paradigmatic structural analysis.

2.7 STRUCTURALISM IN MARXIST ANALYSIS

Structural Marxism emphasizes Marx's concern with structures that are themselves not visible but which organise reality and account for visible facts. Cultures, like organisms, are structures and have the built-in capacity to reproduce themselves. Unlike the structuralists, structural Marxists do not believe that the structure reproduces itself when internal contradictions between structures or within a structure cannot be overcome. It is rather contended that in such an eventuality the structure evolves or is transformed. (Levinson and Ember, ibid: 1269)

It is generally accepted that the structural analysis in the Marxist thought has its root in the works of French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser. According to him, Marx eliminated the human subject from social theory and constructed a 'new science' of the levels of human practice (economic, political, ideological and scientific) which are inscribed in the structure of a social reality. Hence, the Marxist theory is not 'humanist' or 'historical' but is concerned essentially with the structural analysis of social totalities (e.g. mode of production, social formation); and the object of such analysis is to disclose the 'deep structure'

which underlies and produces the directly observable phenomena of social life. (Bottomore 2000: 527) Maurice Godelier arguing against empiricism and functionalism in anthropology says that for Lévi-Strauss, as for Marx, "structures are not directly visible or observable realities, but levels of reality which exist beyond man's visible relations and whose functioning constitutes the deeper logic of a social system."(ibid: 527-28) The idea of a real structure behind appearances also influenced Marxist political economy where Marx's analysis of commodity in Capital is seen as an exemplary instance of structural analysis. (ibid: 528)

Check your progress 4

Note: 1) Your answer should be about 300 words;

2) You may check your answer with the possible answer given at the end of the Unit.

4) What is Marxist structuralism?

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2.8 STRUCTURALISM IN LITERARY CRITICISM AND SEMIOTICS

Broadly speaking, in literature structuralism is concerned with 'language' in a most general sense: not just the language of utterance in speech and writing. It is concerned with signs and thus with signification. Structuralist theory considers all conventions and codes of communication including, for example, all forms of signals (smoke, fire, traffic lights, flags, gesture), body language, clothes, artifacts, status symbols, and so on. In short, everything in the theory of structuralism is the product of a system of signification or code. The relationship between the elements of the code gives it signification. Codes are arbitrary (like sign) and without them we cannot apprehend reality.

Roman Jakobson's Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances (1956), provides one forms of structuralist theory. He developed a theory based on the concept of binary opposition in the structure of language. He was mainly concerned with the metaphor/metonymy opposition and its implication in the analysis of realism and symbolism. He uses the distinction developed elsewhere between the two axes of language:

i) Syntagmatic and

ii) Paradigmatic

The first may be thought of as a Horizontal line (here one word is associated with other words through contiguity); the second as a vertical line where meanings can be substituted one for another.

Through his study of Aphasia (language disorder resulting from memory loss), Jakobson extends his model to Metaphor and Metonymy. Therefore, the language

disorder acts on the two axes of language in different ways so that those suffering from a 'continuity disorder' tend to use substitution (i.e. metaphor) and those suffering from 'similarity disorder' tend to use association (i.e., metonymy). Jakobson says "Metaphor is alien to similarity disorder, and Metonymy to the continuity disorder." His point is that some forms of writing use one or the other mode predominantly. Romantic and Modernist poetry primarily uses Metaphor, and the Realist novel uses Metonymy. Magic Realism and Post Modernism subvert the mainly metonymic axis of the narrative discourse/novel form. (Cuddon 1992: 543).

Jonathan Culler, who is largely credited with for popularizing structuralist thoughts in the United States, and for developing a theory of structuralist poetics in his book *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature (1975),* propounds that the real object of poetics "is not the work itself but its intelligibility. One must attempt to explain how it is that works can be understood; the implicit knowledge, the conventions that enable readers to make sense of them, must be formulated." Thus, Culler puts more emphasis on reader than the text. His opinion was that while it is possible to determine the rules that govern the interpretation of texts, it is not possible to determine the rules that govern the composition of texts. Thus, the structure resides in the system that underlies the reader's interpretation or 'literary competence' rather than in the text.

French semiotist Roland Barthes (1915-80) interprets cultural practices involving foods and clothes as sign systems which function on the same model as language. Thus, he elaborates the idea that there is a 'garment system' which works like a language. Garments in general are the system (what de Saussure would call 'langue' and Chomsky would call 'competence'); a particular set of garments is the equivalent of a sentence (what de Saussure denotes as ‘parole’ and Chomsky as 'performance'). The same distinction applies to food. Foodstuffs in general constitute the system; a particular menu and meal constitute the 'sentence'.

2.9 THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST CRITIQUE

Despite the path-breaking contributions of structuralism in the study of human society and culture, like all other theoretical perspectives, it has been subjected to serious criticisms. Apart from the criticisms discussed above, it also has come under the onslaught of the poststructuralist/postmodernist thinkers.

Like all modernist philosophical perspectives, structuralism believes in the premises like foundation, certitude, truth, essence, objectivity, universality, etc. Through its faith in the underlying structure of human mind, for example, structuralism affirms its faith on the universal character, and therefore, the essence of human mind. Structural analysis aimed at objectivity, coherence, rigour, and truth, and claimed scientific status for its theories, which would be purged on mere subjective valuations and experiences. Louis Althusser, the celebrated French Marxist, for example, advocated a theoretical anti-humanism and eliminated human practice and subjectivity from the explanatory scheme of his version of Marxism. The structuralists wished to eliminate the concept of the subject which had dominated the philosophical tradition stemming from Descartes through Sartre. In this model, meaning was not the creation of the transparent intentions of an autonomous subject; the subject itself was constituted by its relations within language, so that subjectivity was seen as a social or linguistic construct. The works of the structuralists such as de Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and

Chomsky testify to this fact. Poststructuralists have launched attack on these basic premises of structuralism. French philosopher Jacques Derrida and also Roland Barthes, for example, attack the purported objectivity of structuralist methods. They criticized the structuralist notion that there is fixed and universal structure of linguistic or social relations. They further contend that since structuralism believes in an eternal human nature, which is a humanist proposition, it is not free from the humanist tradition it denounces. Against the structuralist emphasis on abstraction, poststructuralism underscores the importance of the study of daily life, history, politics, and so on. However, it is also true that the both poststructuralism and postmodernism stand only on the foundation laid by structuralism. There is no denying the fact that these new perspectives have emerged out of their critiques of structuralism. On the other hand, various premises of poststructuralism/postmodernism themselves have come under serious criticism in recent times as being obscurantist and extremely relativist.

2.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed in detail what is structuralism and the various debates that exists within structuralism or that it has initiated in the discussion of folklore, society and culture. It will be evident to you that structuralism emerged as one of the most important theoretical approach in social sciences and folklore studies. The unit also discusses the poststructuralist critique of structuralism, viz. the drawbacks of assuming that social existence can be primarily studied in terms of systems.

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2.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1) The four seminal ideas of Saussure are: Firstly, he sees language as a social system that was coherent, orderly and susceptible to understanding and explanation as a whole. Syntax and semantics together constitute a group of rules imposed on individuals, and to which individual thought must be submitted if it seeks expression to systems of rules and codes.

   Structural analysis focuses on the underlying rules which organised phenomena into a social system, analysing such things as totemic practices in terms of divisions between the sacred and profane in traditional societies, or cuisine in modern societies in terms of culinary rules.

   Secondly, de Saussure points out the arbitrariness of the verbal sign, the signifier, which being conventional supposes neither an intrinsic rapport with the concept which constitutes its signification, the signified, nor in consequence any inherent stability with it.

   Thirdly, de Saussure makes a significant distinction between, on the one hand, langue, the institution of language, and on the other hand, parole, or the particular and individual acts of linguistic expression.

   Fourthly, de Saussure views the structures as entirely independent of history (diachrony). A diachronic approach to the study of a language involves an examination of its origins, development, history and change. In contrast, he opts for a synchronic approach which entails the study of a linguistic system in a particular state, without reference to time.

2) Lévi-Strauss' structuralism has been subjected to several criticisms. His approach is based on the hypothetical existence of an unconscious meaning of cultural phenomena. Since cultural meaning is hidden, it can not be deciphered by empirical study. Thus Lévi-Strauss seems to be more concerned with the unconscious, rather than the conscious meaning. His firm belief in the Freudian concepts that 'conscious data is always erroneous and illusory' is an exaggeration. Nor is it true that everything unconscious is the 'real motor' of the mind, and everything conscious merely a relatively unimportant side issue. Besides, he does not tell us as to a] how do the myths survive, and b] how do they get perpetuated functionally irrespective of the changes that have occurred to mankind. Last but not the least, Lévi-Strauss' model of structure has come under criticism as being basically static in nature. It does not take the change factor into account.

3) Propp's method of analysing fairytales can be compared to that brand of linguistic structuralism which thrives on formalistic thought and ignores semantics in favour of syntax. This method pays exclusive attention to the rules that govern the construction of statements of any tale. Propp stresses the need to describe a given folkloric phenomenon before one is tempted to

discover the origin of that phenomenon because one can speak about the origin of any phenomenon only after that phenomenon has been described.

Propp discovers that many Russian folktales and fairytales have the one and the same underlying story. In his Morphology he tries to show how a hundred different tales are in fact variations of the one and same underlying structure (i.e. the straight forward accounting or the bare bones of a story devoid of the details).

Propp works out an analytical approach which he calls 'morphological'. It means "a description of the (Russian fairy) tale according to its component parts and the relation of these components to each other and the whole." Component parts imply such elements of fairy tales which remain same everywhere and therefore constants unlike the elements which change from one tale to another tale, i.e. variables (e.g. the characters or objects of fairy tales). It is to be noted that before the method of Propp became popular, folklore analysis was mainly guided by these variables. Propp holds that it is not characters (dramatis personae) but their constant actions or functions that form the basic elements or the component parts of tales. However, all actions do not qualify to become functions or constant elements. Only those elements which have implication in the progress of the plots of the tale are to be regarded as such. So, Propp devises a method by which one can study the tales according to the functions of the characters (dramatis personae). Thus, function becomes the basic classificatory and analytical unit. How does then he discover these functions? Following are the sentences drawn from Propp.

4) Structural Marxism emphasizes Marx's concern with structures that are themselves not visible but which organise reality and account for visible facts. Cultures, like organisms, are structures and have the built-in capacity to reproduce themselves. Unlike the structuralists, structural Marxists do not believe that the structure reproduces itself when internal contradictions between structures or within a structure cannot be overcome. It is rather contended that in such an eventuality the structure evolves or is transformed.

It is generally accepted that the structural analysis in the Marxist thought has its root in the works of French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser. According to him, Marx eliminated the human subject from social theory and constructed a 'new science' of the levels of human practice (economic, political, ideological and scientific) which are inscribed in the structure of a social reality. Hence, the Marxist theory is not 'humanist' or 'historical' but is concerned essentially with the structural analysis of social totalities (e.g. mode of production, social formation); and the object of such analysis is to disclose the 'deep structure' which underlies and produces the directly observable phenomena of social life. Maurice Godelier arguing against empiricism and functionalism in anthropology says that for Lévi-Strauss, as for Marx, "structures are not directly visible or observable realities, but levels of reality which exist beyond man's visible relations and whose functioning constitutes the deeper logic of a social system."(ibid: 527-28) The idea of a real structure behind appearances also influenced Marxist political economy where Marx's analysis of commodity in Capital is seen as an exemplary instance of structural analysis.