

# I. ASCOLTO E CONFRONTO CON LA REALTÀ ATTUALE: SFIDE E BISOGNI EDUCATIVI

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**A SOCIETY IN TRANSITION! A CULTURE GONE AWRY!  
A RELIGION TURNED VIRTUAL!  
A HUMAN BEING IN THE MAKING! ALL PROCESSES!  
– NOT A DOOM BUT A CREATIVE CHALLENGE  
FOR THE FUTURE!**

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## 1. Introduction

The apocalyptic sounding phrases ‘The end of modernity’, ‘the end of philosophy’ and ‘the end of metaphysics’ mark the theoretical ethos of the postmodern world. Another series of similar sounding phrases like ‘the end of history’, ‘the end of the subject’, ‘the end of metanarratives’, ‘the end of morality’, ‘the end of democracy’ and ‘the end of totalization’ emerged as additional support to this world in the making or in a process of becoming. The postmodern world is not a clearly defined entity which can be described neat and tidy. The term refers to a reality in the making since the 60s in Europe. Now, this air of postmodernity is being carried to the different corners of the globe through the electronic media in such a speed that soon we could think of a pan postmodern ethos.

What is important to keep in mind is that the above sketched scenario refers to an **internal conflict** within modernity, philosophy, metaphysics, history, subject, metanarrative, morality, democracy and totalization that do not allow these concepts to be well defined and formulated. The internal conflict in each of these concepts is unique and it cannot be generalized either.

What can be put forward as a result of this internal conflict is that reality and our perception and interpretation turn out to be ambiguous and uncertain, and relative as it is assumed to be. Concepts and realities once clear and well defined have lost their clarity and definitiveness.

In order to broach this topic, I would like to present the theoretical underpinning of modernity which would be followed by its expressions in daily life in the society, culture, religion and human being. In a similar manner, we will outline the theoretical characteristics of postmodernity first which would be further elaborated in their external expression in the society, culture, religion and the human being.

The paper ends with a few concluding remarks to nuance the present reception of postmodernity in the global situation.

All this would be preceded by a set of preliminary considerations to show the scope of the paper.

## 2. Preliminary Considerations

### 2.1. *Postmodernity reflects life and culture of a particular period*

It is important to bear in mind the age-old conviction that theory and practice are interdependent and that they inspire and enrich each other. There is neither pure theory nor is there any pure practice. Philosophy has reflected life in its myriad forms and different forms of life style have flowed from various philosophies. Modern style of life and Modern thinking were mutually informing and influencing each other. Thinkers are products of the culture to which they belong. When they question critically the life style and the culture to which they belong, they give rise to an enriching and creatively furthered culture. Both are not static. This seamless nature of the interplay between theory and practice or philosophy and life style must be kept in mind to broach the issue of postmodernity. As the scientific and the technological advancement in science which began in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the French revolution dated 1789 and the Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, serve as the background for the beginning and formulation of modern philosophy, so too the late capitalist society and the production of knowledge in that society serve as the background for the emergence of postmodernity. Basically, according to François Lyotard, postmodernity refers to the European late capitalist society of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup> However, it is rather difficult to ascertain what would be the theory of postmodernity and what would be its practical expressions. For, in postmodernity, theory and practice are so intertwined and enmeshed that both are made complex and subtle.

### 2.2. *Postmodernity as a sign of hegemony of European thinking on the developing countries*

The hegemony of European thinking with its emphasis on rationality in the modern period has been imported by the developing countries in different forms and degrees for their own advantage. The science and technology that gave rise to such a rational thinking was also adopted by the third world countries for the benefits that it offered to their predominantly mythical and natural world view. It must

<sup>1</sup> LYOTARD, J.F., *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism? The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 71-82, 1984; LYOTARD, J.F. *The Postmodern Condition. Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* (Edited by J. Alexander and S. Seidman). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 330-341; MIRCHANDANI, R. "Postmodernism and Sociology: From the Epistemological to the Empirical", in *Sociological Theory* 23 (2005)1, pp. 86-115.

be noted that the developing countries have adopted and profited from the modern thinking of the West only in different forms and degrees. There are still areas in the developing countries where the fruits of western modernity have reached in the form of science and technology, but not its theoretical base, i.e. rationality.

### *2.3. Theoretical, conscious and explicit and Practical, unconscious and implicit Postmodernity*

Before we present postmodernity with its characteristics and expressions, it is important to make another important and vital distinction: Theoretical and Explicit postmodernity and Practical and implicit postmodernity. We know that the **theoretical, conscious and explicit postmodernity** has been churned out by the intellectuals in the western universities.<sup>2</sup> With regard to postmodernity, even in the western universities, there isn't any uniform understanding and acceptance. Some view it still with suspicion and others see it as a blessing for which they have been waiting. All kinds of reactions to postmodernity can be seen and distinguished in the precincts of the same university and within the same department. The common man and woman in the west will not know that he/she is living in a postmodern world. He may live and breathe the postmodern ethos without being aware of it. This we would call as **practical, unconscious and implicit postmodernity**. This above distinction is important to broach the issue of postmodernity at a global level.

### *2.4. Postmodernity is the work of academic elite in the universities of the world*

If what we have said about the reception of postmodernity in the west is true, it is equally and even more true in the developing countries. Combing through the literature available on the subject in the developing countries, one gets the impression that postmodernity is a concept that is familiar to an elite group of intellectuals and others who are interested in new trends in thinking, especially in the departments of philosophy, theology, literature, film, art and architecture. For others the concept is a fashionable term whose meaning is known to them in the vaguest terms possible. A studied opinion is available only to a few who are open, critical and interested. Even among those who have a studied opinion on postmodernity, the views vary. Some condemn it outright saying that it is another disguised form of domination of the west. The common man or woman in the developing worlds is not in the know of such a trend in thinking. Though there isn't any explicit conscious theoretical knowledge of the concept present among the ordinary people, due to the enormous

<sup>2</sup> The terms deconstruction, post-structuralism, radical hermeneutics, genealogical approach to reality, language constructs reality, plurality in world views, incredulity to metanarratives and all forms of totalization, A-theistic theology, and the theoretical treatment of these concepts have occupied a major part of what could be called theoretical and explicit postmodernity.

influence of Mass media in its manifold form, the expressions of postmodernity, in the life styles, in the form of dress, food habits, ethical behaviour, choice of politics, religious worship, method of learning, adherence to authority, ways of speaking and consuming products, etc., have been carried over to the rest of the globe. In the developing countries, young adults have adapted themselves to these expressions of postmodernity without knowing critically from where they come and how they have been arrived at. In other words, though the explicit and theoretical postmodernity is almost missing among the ordinary people in the developing countries, the unconscious, practical and implicit expressions are not lacking. People in the developing countries are breathing and living the postmodern ethos without being aware of it as in the west even if it is not to the same degree of intensity.

### *2.5. Reception and Reaction of developing countries towards Postmodernism*

There are also authors in the developing countries who outright condemn the elusive character of postmodernity and its positive contribution to the society at large,<sup>3</sup> and for the developing countries in particular. Makarand Pranjabe, a professor of English from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India, who is rather critical about postmodernity's positive contribution to the society as a whole, makes this very strong statement regarding postmodernity's use for the Indian culture and society:

[P]ostmodernism was born out of a crisis in Western thought. No doubt this crisis may have in part been quickened by the decline of Europe which might, in turn, have been influenced by events in the Third World. Yet, no one will dispute that internal, more than external causes are responsible for its rise. In India, however, postmodernism is relevant owing to external causes, because it has acquired power in the West. How can we who haven't even had a proper Enlightenment or accepted modernity even at the intellectual level, repudiate it? The whole issue is borrowed and extraneous as far as we are concerned. We have been forced, willy nilly, to take cognizance of postmodernism as the subalterns and underlings of the West. We have, again, welcomed with alacrity our master's discarded and soiled underwear.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> ASWAGOSH, *Pinnaveenathuvam: Pithum Thelivum* (Chennai: Kavikuyil Acchagam, 2002). This is a Tamil book which can be translated as **Postmodernity: Madness and Lucidity**. The author of this book warns other young Tamil writers and thinkers to be wary of postmodern thinking which is on the verge of leading into frenzy or madness; S.L. DOSHI, *Postmodern Perspective on Indian Society*, (New Delhi, Rawat Publication, 2008); CHIDI UGWĒ, "Implications of post-structuralism and postmodernity for current anthropology in Africa", ([https://www.academia.edu/6154625/Implications\\_of\\_Poststructuralism\\_and\\_Postmodernism\\_for\\_Current\\_Anthropology\\_in\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/6154625/Implications_of_Poststructuralism_and_Postmodernism_for_Current_Anthropology_in_Africa)). Accessed 24 November 2014.

<sup>4</sup> MAKARAND R. PARANJABE, "Postmodernism and India" <http://www.makarand.com/acad/PostmodernismandIndia.htm>. Accessed 11 February 2015.

Noah Lumun Abanyam, a professor of Sociology from the University of Mkar, Nigeria, states with regard to postmodern entry into Africa through its technology: "It is obvious that western technologies are having disastrous effects on African cultural values. The inability of Africa to develop their indigenous scientific knowledge exposes them to many challenges."<sup>5</sup> Marguerite A Peeters makes a very strong statement with regard the relationship between Africa and postmodernity: "Postmodern paradigms are arriving in the non-Western world at a time when they seem to correspond to what people aspire to."<sup>6</sup> Puja Mondal, an Indian essayist, says that in two ways postmodernity has come to India: information mode of development, and cultural, social and economic change. However, she makes another insightful statement which could be taken as the case for other parts of the third world countries: "The postmodernity of Delhi is different from that of Agra or that of a village. It comes in parts, it is found in degrees. It has a process."<sup>7</sup>

If I may take the liberty to make a general statement on the reception of postmodernity in the non-Western world, it would be the following: There is a mixed response to the entry of postmodernity in the different non-Western countries; there is a certain ambivalence in their appreciation and criticism of postmodernity.

### **3. Modernity**

#### **3.1. *Introduction***

The story of modernity begins<sup>8</sup> with the explicit turn, in thinking, towards the human being. This is known as the anthropological turn. Heidegger hits the nail on the head when he writes: "That period we call modern [...] is defined by the fact that man becomes the centre and measure of all beings." He even identified the Western epistemologically oriented modern metaphysics with anthropology: "Philosophy in

<sup>5</sup> ABANYAM, NOAH LUMUN, "The Effects of Western Technology on African Cultural Values," *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science* (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 8, Issue 4 (Mar.-April. 2013), pp. 26-28. <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol8-issue4/F0842628.pdf> Accessed 12 February 2015.

<sup>6</sup> MARGUERITE A PEETERS, "Postmodernity and Africa: In the Balance" in <http://www.faith.org.uk/article/march-april-2008-postmodernity-and-africa-in-the-balance>. Accessed 19 February 2015.

<sup>7</sup> PUJA MONDAL, "Indian Society is a Postmodern Society – Justified!" <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/essay/india-society-is-a-postmodernity-society-justified/39889/>. Accessed 17 February 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The chronological or the historical beginning of modernity does not concern us so much though it would certainly throw some light on the problem. Some hold that it began with the Renaissance, others take Descartes as the Father of modern period, etc. What concerns us here is the significant characteristics that define modernity as a whole. To be frank, it must be conceded that what we are presenting here is a postmodern retrospective reconstruction of modernity which takes into consideration to a great extent the early critiques of modernity.

<sup>9</sup> M. HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV: *Nihilism*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 28.

the age of completed metaphysics is anthropology.”<sup>10</sup> For his French admirer Michel Foucault, as Herbert Schnädelbach puts it, “the entire philosophical discourse of modernity [... is] simply an anthropological intermezzo in the history of thought.”<sup>11</sup>

This human reality has been characterized by the following: 1. the autonomous rational subject; 2. the totalizing reason; 3. the associated pictures of knowledge as representation; 4. reason as a search for foundations (foundationalism) and 5. progress in its different forms (including the different ideologies of emancipation like Marxism). Some equate modernity with the great ideas of the Enlightenment: *Reason*, *Objectivity*, and *Science*. What follows is a presentation of these themes.

### 3.2. *The Triumphant Subject*

Individual interpretations may vary in their perception of the modern conception of the subject and its positive or negative consequences for the society and culture as a whole. But no serious scholar today would deny the fact that the independent, neutral, self-determining, selfaffirming Cartesian Subject is *the most determining factor* of the whole of modernity.

Though the origin of the human self as the *imago dei* can be traced back to Augustine’s *Confessions*, the subject of knowledge as “a purely autonomous ego”<sup>12</sup> has to be seen against the background of the *epistemology-centred metaphysical project* of the modern period which arose as a result of the critical dialogue between traditional metaphysics and modern science.

### 3.3. *The Autonomous Reason*

In 1784, as an answer to the question ‘what is Enlightenment’ Kant responded saying, ‘*Sapere aude!*’ ‘Have courage to use your own understanding!’ ‘This has been

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Holzwege, p. 91 f. cited in M. HEIDEGGER, *The End of Philosophy*. Trans. J. Stambaugh, (London: Souvenir Press, 1975), p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> H. SCHNÄDELBACH, “The Face in the Sand: Foucault and the Anthropological Slumber”, in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, Ed. by Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offé and Albrecht Wellmer, Trans. by William Rehg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 318.

<sup>12</sup> Even though authors like L. Dupré, J. Habermas, H. Blumenberg, E. Voegelin, Alasdair McIntyre and others try to present a more nuanced and a holistic picture of the nature and origin of modernity, they do not question this aspect. All that they can say is that modernity cannot and should not be reduced to the rationalistic subject. Especially see L. DUPRÉ, *Passage to Modernity: A n Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993). In this work the author tries to distinguish the ‘early humanist notion of human creativity which refers to a new synthesis of the different facets of reality’ from the 1 monolithic rationalistic subject of Descartes.’ However, he immediately acknowledges that the early humanist notion of human creativity already had most of the principles that gave rise to the Cartesian rational subject

interpreted as expressing absolute confidence in the unlimited power of Reason.’ Two centuries earlier Galileo declared that he had deciphered the code in which the great book of nature was written. Descartes was certain that his confidence in the power of natural understanding would destroy all doubts. Leibnitz’s formulation of the commensurability rules constituted an absolute judge of every controversy. The list could be extended. These and other facts of the modern period confirm the picture drawn by the so-called postphilosophers. In referring to the modern conception of reason, Rorty affirms that it has the capacity to ground everything including itself, Lyotard argues that it is capable of engendering a metanarrative which legitimizes all discourses and Gadamer believes that it can divest itself from all prejudices and act as an impartial and objective judge. According to Marcelo Dascal these are justified presentations of reason in modernity.

### 3.4. *The Concept of Progress*

‘Progress’ is another watch word of modernity. It meant advance both in quality and quantity. Strengthened by the enormous amount of information provided by the still developing natural and human sciences, modernity set out to conquer systematically all different areas of human existence. In this context progress was construed as *dominion* over nature that offered resistance.<sup>13</sup> Every domain of the cosmos, both the material and the nonmaterial aspects of it, has been subjected to minute experimentation using ever better and ever more efficient apparatus.

Progress was also translated as *liberation or emancipation*. This meant freeing oneself from all types of alleged enslavement: human and superhuman, natural and supernatural, practical and theoretical, religious and secular, internal and external. In short there is the craving for absolute autonomy. One could think of the different ideologies of emancipation: the French Revolution with its ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ slogan, the Marxist revolution for a classless society are classical examples.

*Fragmentation of knowledge* was interpreted positively as a sign of progress. The more subdisciplines one visualised the easier was it to make progress. This was because the more detailed and limited the area of research, the better one was *in control* of the subject matter. In this connection what Lyotard says concerning the relation between the absence of consensus and the development in the sciences is apposite. He says that “contrary to what might be thought, this absence of consensus has [...] only worked to allow a more rapid and more impressive development of the sciences.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Lyotard, progress in modernity was also construed as a *rectilinear movement* with a set goal to be pursued.<sup>15</sup> One of the basic characteristics of what he

<sup>13</sup> See in this connection D.R. HILEY, *Philosophy in Question: Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 39-64.

<sup>14</sup> W. VAN REIJEN and D. VEERMAN, “An Interview with Jean-Francois Lyotard,” p. 280.

<sup>15</sup> J.-F. LYOTARD, “Note on the meaning of ‘post,’” in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985*. (Ed.) Julien Pefanis, Trans. Don Barry and Wlad Godzich, (Minneapolis: Uni-

calls 'metanarratives' is precisely such a goal directedness. A metanarrative finds its legitimation in an ultimate finality (humanity, classless society, etc.) which implies a rectilinear movement.

### *3.5. Knowledge as representation*

In the history of Western philosophy, modernity as a whole has been associated with the issue of epistemology. It refers to one of the many ways, i.e., the cognitive way, in which human beings relate to the world around. Basically, the problem was this: how does one make congruous the order of representations in consciousness with the order of representations outside the self. This is what has come to be known as "the representation theory of knowledge."

Ockam's razor aimed at an economy of knowing. Starting from this transitional figure, philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley and Hume tried to justify, appropriate, and integrate the apparently successful methods of the then fast developing natural sciences into their discipline. Such an integration implied the ratification of a mechanistic world view of the natural sciences. In such a world view, meaning and purpose of events were not divinely ordained; there was no prearranged, external, eschatological future; there was no human dependency on external forces; but all these, meaning and purpose, teleology, human dependency etc., were subjected to the autonomous cognitive faculty of the human person for whom the cosmos appeared as one object that he/she is expected to **study and** develop with his/her own goals and purposes. As a result there came into existence a subject-object dichotomy in knowing which would continue to haunt the whole of the Modern period. The endless debate between the rationalists (Descartes, Leibnitz, Spinoza) and the empiricists (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) on the priority of the subjective or the objective poles of knowing respectively is well known and needs no explanation. A sharp distinction between the spiritual and the material, the internal and the external, the supernatural and the natural, the subject and the object, the soul and body, was the high price one had to pay.

## **4. Modern World in its expressions**

With its five-fold characteristics, the modern world gave rise to an image of a society, culture, religion and human being that was well defined, calculated and rationally justified.

## 4.1. *Society*

### 4.1.1. *Technocratic society*

The new discoveries in the field of science and technology have contributed to a society that began to rely on them as the panacea for all its imperfections and ills. The society and its organization became stratified and entrenched with rules and regulations after the model of machines. The society reflected the mechanistic world view of the Newtonian science. While the society and all its sectors were interdependent, it was unfortunately operating like a machine with parts put together to function temporarily. The technocratic society was a functional society. The technocrats could predict the various dynamics of the society leaving nothing to chance and accident. Nothing should be contingent. The various problems of a society were analysed and the solutions were found for them with ever better and precise parameters. The society was seen as growing out of a primitive stage to a stage of development which would be called modern and in stark contrast to the traditional societies with its myths, stories and symbols. There is an element of predictability borrowed from the technical world that was imposed on the society. The society should be all the time improving and progressing towards perfection where all signs of error would be removed. The desire for a perfect society was the dream of modernity and the technocrats did everything within their capacity to ascertain this.

### 4.1.2. *Rationally justified society*

While human reason is a blessing, it was seen as the soul arbiter of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. The search for objectivity and certainty dominated the society. The schemes offered and the projects planned for the society had calculability as their basic characteristic. There was no room for mysteries, ambiguities, uncertainties in the society. Ambiguity and uncertainty were signs of weakness and underdevelopment. The presence of mysteries in the society were remnants of the uncritical mythical past. The search for causes and solutions for human problems were addressed through quantifiable surveys. Faith, feelings, emotions, and anxieties, were seen as infantile expressions that should be gradually overcome. What cannot be explained rationally cannot be true and certain.

### 4.1.3. *Ideologically shaped society*

The modern society was full of ideologies of emancipation and explanation of different kinds. Every ideology was seen as important, certain, true and absolute. The ideologies were the offshoots of the various systems of philosophy formed on the basis of speculative thinking using human reason. One can refer to Marxism, Socialism, Capitalism, Democracy, Totalitarianism, Utilitarianism, Materialism, Pragmatism, etc., as examples of ideologies that shaped the modern world. Every ideology had its philosophy to support it and to entrench it as universally applicable.

We know how Marxism became the life philosophy for one part of the globe and Capitalism of the other and the cold war that ensued and lasted for half a century.

#### 4.1.4. *Secularized society*

The society was seen as independent of any other external agency and power, including God. The society began to function on its own powers and capacities without recourse to supernatural and spiritual powers. The society was seen as come of age, reached adulthood and freed from the constant surveillance of a super power, called God. It was a society built on materialistic principles. The western society in particular which was under the control of religious authorities emancipated itself and became increasingly independent.

### 4.2. *Culture*

#### 4.2.1. *Culture and Power*

The onslaught of science and technology gave rise to a modern culture that was bereft of relationships and the centrality of human persons. We know that modern culture was built upon objective and certain knowledge. The one who had more knowledge could control more data and had more power. Mass production, increased efficiency of technology slowly turned the predominantly agrarian traditional culture into an urban culture where there were more and more people with less and less personal interaction. Local cultural forms were substituted by universally accepted cultural forms like dress, eating habits, living conditions, relationships, etc.

#### 4.2.2. *Colonization - Domination of one culture*

The traditional agrarian cultures did not dominate vast areas of people. They certainly would have had small family feuds for property and share of the produce. But, it was the modern culture, which had the power to control big number of people with their knowledge, gave rise to colonization. Dominating other cultures by one single culture because of new knowledge gained and the power acquired, became a bleak reality of the modern culture. The dominant cultures like Europe, England and America became powerful. They could dominate even age-old well established cultures like India, Africa and China. While there might have been some form of colonization before the modern era, but the massive and conscious manner in which this was done was unique to modernity. Colonization meant the disappearance of traditional local cultural forms of art, dance and theatre. Language, which is the shaper of a culture, was replaced by the language of the colonizers.

Modern culture had not only dominated and colonized different peoples all over the world, it also controlled nature for its own selfish interests. The traditional living in harmony with nature had been systematically and in a subtle manner replaced

by living away from nature in man-made concrete buildings surrounded by more and more buildings. The respect and reverence for nature was replaced by control, usefulness and profit. Nature was seen as something to be controlled and made use of for the development of humankind.

### 4.3. *Religion*

#### 4.3.1. *Institutionalization*

Religion that gave meaning and identity to people became more power-based and institutionalized. Religions though separated from the state, still had the power to rule people. It aligned with colonization of different countries and imposed its values and life styles on people who were different. Institutionalization was the fundamental characteristic of modern period. This brought along with it politicization of religion. The Modern culture saw the Christianizing of several countries in the world. While many of the missionaries went with only Christ as their message, unwittingly it was always seen as another form of domination by the West. The constant struggle between the church and the state in the Christian countries in Europe isolated both the church and the state more and more. Each started living his own independent life. This led to unprecedented autonomy of the civil society.

#### 4.3.2. *Secularized Religion*

With the separation of the church and the state in the Christian countries in Europe, a new reality emerged. Religion, having lost its hold on the civil society, got restricted to the precincts of the church and related institutions. Gradually and in increasing numbers, people began to dissociate themselves from the church and its tenets. New forms of religiosity emerged that did not have God as the centre of life and activity. Instead, the new forms of religiosity began to invest on inner worldly or immanent experience of the transcendent. The realistic and personal God of the established religions were interpreted as the opium of the ordinary and uncritical people and was slowly disappearing.

#### 4.3.3. *Power and Influence*

Though religion lost its total control of the spiritual and material realms of the society, it did have some power and influence on its members who consciously chose to be in the church. People began to belong to the church by choice and not by birth as it was the case in the traditional society when religion had control over the spiritual and material domains. The church was still powerful in and through her massive institutions of all kinds.

#### 4.3.4. *Religious Freedom*

When church was relegated to the private sphere of the individual's choice, it still appealed to the world to respect religious freedom as an inalienable right of the human person. It used its moral authority to demand religious freedom from the civil society for its adherents. The church got several privileges like exemption from paying income tax, land tax, etc.

#### 4.4. *Human Being*

For modernity, human being was not a mystery. He could be dissected into different parts and experimented upon. Though human being became the center of modernity, he nevertheless lost all his mystery and charm and became just a number.

##### 4.4.1. *A Thinking thing*

Following the lead given by Rene Descartes, the father of Modern philosophy, man was seen and interpreted as a thinking thing. He was a ghost in a machine. That human being became a machine like object did not deprive him of his importance. Because of the hierarchical dualism between spirit and matter, mind and body, consciousness and feeling, etc., the spirit, mind and consciousness were seen as more primary and important than matter, body and feelings. Ideas were given more importance as a consequence than feelings and emotions. The thinking thing was so powerful that it, the autonomous subject, became the meaning giver in the world.

##### 4.4.2. *Human being as demi-god*

As one can imagine, human beings slowly and gradually replaced the role played by God in the pre-modern society. He was a demi-god, giving meaning to the world, with his schemes of perception and knowledge of the world. Human beings were left to fend for themselves without any reference to God as an external agent. In short human being replaced God. There wasn't atheism. There was on the contrary humanism replacing theism. In the modern world, there was still in certain circles place for God, like the deists who had the need for a God as the starter but not necessary for the day-to-day running of the world. The anti-humanistic tendencies proposed by philosophers like Nietzsche and Heidegger had to be interpreted from this perspective.

##### 4.4.3. *A human being who was transparent*

Human beings were perceived as possessing the capacity for sure and certain knowledge of the things of the world. He was not only the knower but also the known. In his process of knowing himself, there was transparency and clarity about

oneself. The human person was also capable of clear, certain and unambiguous knowledge of the world around. Human being as a subject of knowing was fully transparent and conscious to himself. And as the object of knowledge, he was known fully. There was no place for mysteries in the knowing of the human person as a subject and as an object. The psychological studies and their various branches of knowing about the human person, had given the ambitious impression that they could dissect the consciousness of the human person and know its contents fully through their ever refined tools of research and reflection.

#### 4.4.4. *A human being goal-oriented*

Leaving nothing to chance, human beings were able to set short term and long term goals for themselves. These goals were mostly processes of emancipation for human beings. For example, human beings were set on an ambitious journey of finding natural explanations for the changes and movements on the earth and the cosmos. Nothing could resist such a journey of conquering various spheres of his life: physical, psychological, social, interpersonal and spiritual. There was a scientific temper in achieving the goals set for themselves. Most of the ideologies, like Marxism and Capitalism, were goal-oriented achievements of humanity.

#### 4.4.5. *A human being with unlimited freedom*

Human beings had been gradually getting emancipated from all forms of slavery and control by the church, state, society and ideologies. Freedom had been a birth right of human beings. Human beings would very much guard as sacred their freedom of speech, freedom of life style, freedom of movement, freedom of behaviour, freedom of choice in life, etc. Knowledge and the power acquired by such knowledge, presented the human being as fully free and fully in control of himself and his surroundings.

## 5. Postmodern World

### 5.1. *Introduction*

In trying to define the origin and nature of *postmodernity*, a good number of books and articles on 'modernity-postmodernity' start by first expressing the *inability* of the task.<sup>16</sup> So much so that it has become a fad or a cliché in itself. The inability

<sup>16</sup> M. FEATHERSTONE, in Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 5/2-3 (June 1988), p. 195; S. ZUKIN, "The Postmodern Debate over Urban Form *Theory, Culture & Society*, 5/23 (June 1988), p. 431; "Editorial," *New German Critique*, 33 (Fall 1984), p. 3; D. VOSS and J.C. SCHUTZE, "Postmodernism in Context: Perspectives of a Structural Change in society, Literature, and Literary Criticism," in *New German Critique*, 47(Spring/Summer 1989), p. 119.

of such a task is partly due to a) the *chronological proximity*” (the transition from modernity to postmodernity is a phenomenon which we are now experiencing or living with), partly also due to b) its *ubiquitous character* (though it began as a phenomenon referring to the change in style in architecture from the high modernism to postmodernism, now the term has been appropriated by disciplines as varied as art, literature, film, music, theatre, novels, politics, philosophy, theology and culture as a whole) and especially due to c) *the pluriformity of its significations* (contradictory opinions abound) or its *polysemic character*, and not the least due to d) the *confusion in using different terms* (which, despite their similarity, differ in meaning).

Whether one construes it as a *definitive break or rupture* from, or a *radicalization of*, or a *selfcriticism of*, or a *continuation of* modernity, or as a *nostalgic return* to premodern forms of life or styles, one thing is certain, i.e., the term postmodernity is a *relational* term. Positively or negatively it refers or relates to something that has preceded it. Thus the prefix ‘post’. Commenting on a question as regards the misunderstandings surrounding the term ‘postmodern’ that he in spite of himself helped to popularize, Lyotard gives the following explanation: “I take the term in a sense which is completely different [...] from its designation as the end of modernism. I have said and will say again that ‘postmodern’ signifies not the end of modernism, but another relation to modernism.”<sup>17</sup>

From the enormous number of articles and books published and the international congresses organized, one can make this general statement: after a completely positive or negative emotional reaction to postmodernity, a certain intellectual sobriety has dawned on the debate. While some still continue to greet it with overenthusiasm, some others examine it with guarded suspicion. While some construe it as a blessing, some others consider it as a shoddy concoction or eclecticism whose spurious novelty would be shortlived. The following exposition on postmodernity will be limited, partial and more descriptive than evaluative and it will be presented from the perspective of ‘the end of modernity’ or ‘poststructuralism’. We shall do this by taking some key phrases which characterize the phenomenon of postmodernity, and which implicitly take distance from modernity.

## 5.2. Characteristics of Postmodernity

### 5.2.1. A Cynical outlook on the enlightenment ideals

Peter Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason* offers a provocative view of the West German context of the Weimar Republic in which the events bore a counterwitness to the promises of the enlightenment:

<sup>17</sup> W. VAN REIJEN and D. VEERMAN, “An Interview with Jean-François Lyotard,” in *Theory, Culture & Society* (SAGE, London, Newbury Park, Beverly Hills and New Delhi), Vol. 5(1988), p. 277.

Whoever speaks of cynicism draws attention to the limits of Enlightenment. In this respect, the concern with the salient features of Weimar cynicism aside from the advantage of clarity also promises to be fruitful for the philosophy of history. The Weimar Republic represents in the course of German history not only the belated development of a nationstate heavily burdened by the Wilhelminian legacy, the spirit of a cynically illiberal government but also a paradigm for 'failed enlightenment'.<sup>18</sup>

Liotard makes a similar point when he refers to the repeated failures of the ideals of the enlightenment. The attitude of the theory makers was one of cynicism. What is it anyway? "Times are hard, but modern." This Italian saying, which Sloterdijk uses as an epigraph for the chapter entitled, "Cynicism The Twilight of False Consciousness," puts in a nutshell the essence of cynicism. Sloterdijk defines cynicism as an "*enlightened false consciousness*".<sup>19</sup>

Cynicism, in contemporary society, which expresses one aspect of the postmodern mood, can be described as follows: Knowing fully well (*enlightened*) the catastrophic consequences of the premises of the Enlightenment, one accepts, albeit unwillingly (*false consciousness*) to live with it, not because there is no way out, but by the sheer necessity of the situation. Starting from Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Adorno and Horkheimer, almost all the early critics of modernity formulated their critique on such a basis. Their criticism was basically directed against the lopsided development of scientific reason which led to a calculative, functional, instrumental, rational, objectivistic, and formal interpretation of the society, which absorbed all the rich variety and fullness of reality into its monolithic, totalizing gaze of reason and autonomous subject.

### 5.2.2. "Playing with the pieces is postmodern"<sup>20</sup>

If, according to modernity, progress was interpreted in terms of grand narratives of emancipation in history, what Lyotard calls 'metanarratives', the speed with which the changes take place makes the term progress within postmodernity meaningless and redundant. Progress does not refer to something new that is coming into existence, but instead it is like the Nietzschean 'eternal return of the same.' In this regard, Kolakowski observes the following:

It seems to us sometimes that it is less the content of changes and more their dizzy space which terrifies us and leaves us in a state of neverending insecurity, feeling that nothing is certain or established any longer and that what is new is likely to become obsolete in no time. [...] We all participate in those changes, and we bemoan them

<sup>18</sup> P. SLOTERDIJK, "Cynicism The Twilight of False Consciousness," in *New German Critique* 33(Fall, 1984), p. 196. This text forms the first two chapters of the twovolume German *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 192.

<sup>20</sup> J. BAUDRILLARD, "Game with the Vestiges," in *On the Beach* 5 (Winter), 1984, p. 24: cf. also ID., "On Nihilism," in *On the Beach* 6 (Spring 1984), pp. 38-39.

nonetheless, because they seem to deprive our lives of any substance we can safely rely upon.<sup>21</sup>

‘Because they seem to deprive our lives of any substance we can safely rely upon.’ Was this not the cry that falls on the deaf ears of the madman in Nietzsche: “What does nihilism mean? That *the uppermost values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; the ‘why?’ receives no answer.<sup>22</sup> Jean Baudrillard, trying to construct (deconstruct?) a new social theory of the postmodern era, observes an ‘implosion’ of meaning where the boundaries in reality disappear which characterizes the meaningless and nihilistic state of the society. “All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces that is postmodern.

### 5.2.3. *Dedifferentiation*

Many have disputed Lyotard’s thesis that the contemporary scepticism before ‘metanarratives’ (which is one of the basic characteristic of modernity for Lyotard) has been the cause of the birth of the postmodern condition. According to them, such a refusal of ‘metanarratives’ was integral to the very rise of modernism itself. They adduce reasons for their claim. Baudelaire, the father of aesthetic modernism, broke with the foundationalist assumptions of realism to celebrate the transitory, the fleeting, and the contingent. Nietzsche has, in a similar manner, bid farewell to foundationalism in ethics and epistemology. Even Max Weber himself had a post Enlightenment and postmetanarrative idea of modernity. Such departures from modernity could be construed “as a process of differentiation.” Commenting on de-differentiation, he makes the following remarks: “De-differentiation is [...] present in the postmodernist refusal to separate the author from his or her oeuvre or the audience from the performance; in the postmodernist transgression of the boundary between literature and theory, between high and popular culture, between what is properly cultural and what is properly social”.<sup>23</sup>

### 5.2.4. *Postempiricist turn in science*

In the historically oriented philosophy of science, Thomas S. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is an exemplar, a gospel that has set the terms, in the 50s, for a renewed debate on the nature and the development of scientific knowledge. Kuhn’s ideas revolve around two basic concepts: paradigm change and the incommensurability of paradigms. He defines a paradigm, as an achievement sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. At the same time it must be sufficiently open ended to leave all

<sup>21</sup> L. KOLAKOWSKI, *Modernity on Endless Trial*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> F. NIETZSCHE, *Der Wille Zur Macht*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> S. LASH, “Discourse or Figure? Postmodernism as a ‘Regime of Signification’” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 5/2-3 (June 1988), p. 312.

sorts of problems to the redefined group of practitioners to resolve. In other words, a paradigm is an open ended model of research that has won the day, by declaring a previously successful model of research as inadequate and at the same time by overthrowing it, in a moment of substantial crisis in scientific research. The growth of scientific knowledge is perceived, according to Kuhn, as a revolutionary change of such paradigms. The perception and the understanding of problems in a particular paradigm, its presuppositions, its method of research, and its goals, are so different that there cannot be any common 'super paradigm' to evaluate them. In other words, the paradigms are incommensurable. These concepts of paradigm and the incommensurability of paradigms with one another have accomplished an unprecedented revolution in the nature and the growth of scientific knowledge. Feyerabend, the *enfant terrible*, the 'maverick' (as some call him), the most provocative thinker of the recent postempirical philosophy of science, radicalizes this view of Kuhn, to Kuhn's consternation. He pushes to the extreme Kuhn's theory of the incommensurability of paradigms and affirms a total incommensurability of rival theories. For him, the demarcation between scientific traditions and artistic traditions is an illusion. The growth of scientific knowledge, like development in art, is not cumulative and does not follow an evolutionary rational progress. To make it brief: Science is not a theoryfree, neutral, objective, collection of pure facts; instead, it is as theoryladen, as prejudiced, and as subjective as any other discipline. Besides, though it appears that science develops in a cumulative way, according to postempiricist science, it moves in a chaotic, revolutionary, antagonistic way, one selfvalidating paradigm making place for another.

#### 5.2.5. *Decentred subject?*

If modernity was subjectcentred, then the transition to a postmodern conception of the subject, which manifests a dissatisfaction with modernity, is complicated, for it has passed through a number of not so homogeneous critiques in the past. Within modernity the constant debate between rationalists and empiricists, and between idealists and realists on the priority of the subjective pole or the objective pole in the issue of knowledge, was already the first critique of the subjectcentred philosophy of modernity. Then at the hands of the masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, the same subjectcentred philosophy underwent such a scathing that it had to be purged of its hidden agendas like power orientation, totalization, ideological manipulation, claims to unwarranted transparency, etc. After Marx, the subjectcentred philosophy was not any more innocent, objective, ideologyfree. After Nietzsche, along with the death of God, the Subject, subjectcentred philosophy, which was, in Nietzsche's opinion, its consequence, must also give way. Similarly, Freud's conception of the unconscious has meant a death blow to the allegedly transparent, conscious, neutral, subject that claimed to be in full control of itself. In the subsequent trends in philosophy, particularly during this century, like Logical positivism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Pragmatism, Process thinking, Structuralism and Poststructuralism, subjectcentred philosophy would have its detractors

and defenders. Those detractors who already sang subjectcentred philosophy's swan song soon came to realize that they had exaggerated it, and in the same measure those champions who stubbornly held on to the subjectcentred thinking were made to realize that they were fighting a losing battle, for both the detractors and the champions of the cause of subjectcentred philosophy were not clear about what they were rejecting or defending respectively. In other words, the identity of the subject that is in question has not been clarified. In this context, it is apt to cite Agnes Heller's warning: "Before someone is buried, they need first to be identified. Otherwise, the alleged corpse may resume business right after the funeral."<sup>24</sup>

We have already presented the nature of the subjectcentred philosophy of modernity and the characteristics of the totalizing subject as the meaning giver and knower. Does that presentation of the nature of the subject incorporate all the different meanings given to it in the above passage? In a certain sense all these meanings of the term 'subject' elaborate the polysemic nature of what we have already indicated as 'the paradigm of consciousness'. Further they do enhance the description we have given of the totalizing subject.

I think Schnädelbach has expressed the phenomenon of the 'death of the subject' or 'the death of man' in simple words which are in keeping with our presentation of the modern subject:

'Farewell to man' means the end of the notion that man is the center of the world, the author of his history and the foundation of all knowledge, including the knowledge of himself. This modern antihumanism says that man should no longer make himself into a principle but should realize he is merely an epiphenomenon of subhuman and superhuman powers and processes.<sup>25</sup>

When postmodernity decenters the subject as totalizing and unifying, it makes an implicit plea for accepting difference. It constitutes the modern nostalgic insistence on the reentrenchment of the subject as a 'fetish' in the sense in which Freud used it, i.e., an object that serves as a substitute for the penis thought to be removed. A substitute that denies (sexual) difference. The subject may be upheld as long as it is not taken as a substitute for an imagined lack without which one suffers from a selfimposed impotence. The denial of the subject is identical with the acceptance of one's (whatever it may be) difference. The postmoderns deny a subject which is an imagined object that has been so entrenched with powers and potentialities in the past that one begins to absolutize it and even divinize it. It is such a process of absolutisation or divinisation of the subject that is bemoaned. When the autonomous subject is problematised by broaching the question of its difference, it leads to another key theme of the postmoderns, namely, the interest in the 'other' of Western reason.

<sup>24</sup> AGNES HELLER, *Can Modernity Survive?*, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> H. SCHNADELBACH, "The Face in the Sand: Foucault and the Anthropological Slumber", p. 311.

### 5.2.6. *The Other of Western reason?*

In the philosophy of Levinas and Derrida, who acknowledge constantly their indebtedness to Heidegger, we observe the following: Like Heidegger, both of them take into consideration 'Occident in its entirety' and confront it with its 'other,' which announces itself in 'radical upheavals' economically and politically (that is, manifestly) by new constellations between Europe and the Third World, metaphysically by the end of anthropocentric thought. This 'other' has been interpreted as anything that transcends, that cannot be contained within, that puts into question, and shatters the illusions of, the totalizing gaze of the monopolistic, transcendental reason and the foundational autonomous subject. For the masters of suspicion, in one way or another, the 'other' of Western metaphysics is that which is conveniently suppressed or forgotten: the 'unconscious' for Freud, the 'interests of domination by the Bourgeoisie' for Marx, the 'vital forces of human nature' for Nietzsche.

In Heidegger's criticism of Western metaphysics as the forgetfulness of Being, the Unthought thought of Western philosophy since Plato, one can discover a similar 'other'. Levinas's ethically oriented ontology based on the event of *'the face of the other'* is another such instance of the 'other' of Western philosophy. Derrida's *deconstruction*, Foucault's *genealogy*, Lyotard's *paralogy*, Kuhn's concept of *incommensurability*, the importance of playfulness, the contemporary interests in the bodily feelings, emotions and passion, the priority of the rhetoric over logic, the aestheticisation of the culture as a whole, the interest in anything that is termed exotic in films, music, and art, have to be interpreted against the backdrop of such an 'other' of Western philosophy construed as metaphysics.

## 6. Postmodern world in its expressions

On the basis of the characteristics that we have just enumerated, we can fairly present a picture of the society, culture, religion and the human person in postmodernity.

### 6.1. *Society*

#### 6.1.1. *A Society in Rapid Transition!*

Even though in the modern period, the traditional society underwent turmoil, experiencing phenomenal changes because of science and technology, postmodern society is undergoing another ethos. Society is changing so rapidly and in such great flux, it is difficult to define it, it has become very elusive, vague, uncertain, indefinite and open-ended. One can perceive this in the field of morality that is supposed to unite and harmonize common living in a society. There aren't fixed and universal values that can guide the society. There is no direction towards which the society is marching.

### 6.1.2. *A Society that has no clearly demarcated boundary and identity!*

There is a blurring of boundaries of the identity of different groups in the society in which they live. The idea of class is gradually disappearing both in the cities and the villages even though there are class consciousness playing a major role in many of the developing countries. Taking a cue from Pakulski and Crook, Puja Mondal states that the postmodern displays a “simulation of multiple and cross-cutting identities which situated in equally multiple imagined communities... membership to which is a function of taste, choice and commitment so that the categories are therefore, fluid in relation to one another and indeterminate at the boundaries”.<sup>26</sup> Proceeding in the same line she states: “Nowadays, therefore, we are experiencing a process whereby classes are dissolving and the most advanced societies are no longer class societies. There is a weakening of class identities, class ideologies and class organization that framed West European corporatist politics in the middle of the century”.<sup>27</sup>

### 6.1.3. *A Society that is in the making!*

Basically, it is a society in the making. In which direction will society move, what will it achieve for humanity cannot be predetermined. The forces of nature, the forces of the market, the forces of the consumer culture, etc. pull the society in such weird fashion, it is difficult to be clear about the outcome. In other words, any essentialist understanding of the society as a whole or in its various sectors is eyed with suspicion. The question ‘what is postmodern society?’ or ‘what is democracy?’ or ‘what is politics?’ cannot be answered clearly, for the moment such a definition is provided, it ceases to be a postmodern understanding of the society. The provisional nature or character of the society is very much case. We can call the postmodern society as a society in the making.

### 6.1.4. *A Society that is surfing through a virtual space*

Postmodern society has ushered in ‘the end of the real society’ and the celebration of the ‘virtual society’. With the electronic reproduction of sound, images, texts, etc., postmodern society is reeling under the chimera of the difference between what is real and what is representation. Often the reproduced things are better than the original, at least in its exterior form<sup>28</sup>. This is further enhanced by the experience of simulations which need not necessarily be duplication of the pre-given reality. Often, simulations are constructions of images and signs influenced by the floating of

<sup>26</sup> PUJA MONDAL, Postmodernity is a Pluralization of Life-Worlds, <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/essay/postmodernity-is-a-pluralization-of-life-worlds/39877/>. Accessed on 18 February 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> From the production of a ball pin to mega machines, there are duplicates. Often the latter look more real than the original.

other images and sounds but not a reproduction of them. They can be seen as new constructions having some remote connection to what is happening but without any necessary attachment between real and the reproduction.

#### 6.1.5. *A Society that is multicultural and incoherent*

While many cultures were living and working in the same society in the modern period, they were still well-identifiable entities that could be united by some artificial generality. Each had its own history, identity, values, language, etc. The postmodern society is a dedifferentiated society, which means that the differences are not that sharp and clear. As we have mentioned in 6.1.2, there are no clearly identified classes in the postmodern world. It keeps changing so fast that one cannot be sure of the identity of the various groups. There is a criss-crossing of cultures and traditions in the postmodern society without any demarcation line. Puja Mondal, describing the various major features of postmodernity, says: “When we are entering a postmodern age, one of its most distinctive characteristics is a loss of rational and social coherence in favour of cultural images and social reforms and identities marked by fragmentation, multiplicity, plurality and indeterminacy.”<sup>29</sup>

### 6.2. *Postmodern Culture*

We know that culture refers to all the dimensions by which a creative human being constructs his/her human world: science, art, ethics, professional praxis and human love. We are also aware that culture plays a unifying and identity providing role in any society to a group of people. But, in the postmodern world this understanding of culture itself is problematized. Culture is getting produced or constructed by several agencies, often without the conscious role played by human beings. The media, for example, which does not have a single face creates culture for people. Values are acquired from the society and not produced by human agency.

#### 6.2.1. *A Culture gone away*

It is a fact that Christianity which was both a religion and a culture gave identity to the western culture. But, today, in the postmodern world, there isn't one culture that dominates any sphere. The recognition of the value and uniqueness of the multiplicity of cultures in the same society has made culture more complex and subtle. In the postmodern world, it is difficult to put a sharp boundary between cultures. Human beings live in different cultures at the same time. As it were, human beings can choose and make their own mix of the culture according

<sup>29</sup> PUJA MONDAL, “Postmodernity Features: 12 Major Features of Postmodernity – Explained!” <<http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/postmodernity-features-12-major-features-of-postmodernity-explained/39880/>>. Accessed on 12 February 2015.

to their taste and interest. There is a cacophony of several blends and brands overlapping in one place.

The phenomenon of globalization has contributed to this new experience. No one is sure what would be the culture of an Indian living in a city in Europe or an European living in a city in India or any other non-Western world. As Puja Mondal points out: “More and more demands are placed on the individuals, more and more identities are paraded before individuals and they have to juggle hard with the rapidly expanding number of roles as society starts to fragment.”<sup>30</sup>

### 6.2.2. *A Culture on slippery grounds*

Objectivity, certainty and universality were the hallmark of modern science. Postmodern science has been relegated to another subjective, uncertain and local area of knowledge, as good or as bad as any other field of knowledge like politics, religion, art, etc. There is no unifying base on which postmodern culture can be moored or anchored. Postmodern culture is like a smorgasbord where all can have their individual tastes fulfilled, without any one taste dominating the rest. Buffets are usually prepared using all kinds of food items and every buffet is unique, even if it is prepared by the same person. Postmodern culture has become a buffet or a collage or a hotchpotch. “Cultural life is ... viewed as a series of texts interesting with other texts producing more texts. This inter-textual weaving has a life of its own.”<sup>31</sup>

### 6.2.3. *A Culture with power everywhere*

It should be noted that in the postmodern culture, the concept of high and low is deconstructed as an old remnant of platonic dualism that characterized the whole of western philosophy. There isn't one dominant culture that would exercise its hegemony over other cultures on the place. On the other hand, there is a proliferation of cultures of all sorts. In the postmodern culture, there is a happy mix of folk and local cultures with classical and universal cultures in the form of art, dance, music, theatre, etc. In this scenario, there is no right and wrong cultures, the most important and least important. All are important even if not equally. Unlike the modern art, music, dance and theatre which were elitist in taste and genre, postmodern art is populist, and reaches the common people.<sup>32</sup>

## 6.3. *Religion in the postmodern world*

When we discuss the theme of the presence of religion in the post-modern con-

<sup>30</sup> PUJA MONDAL, “Postmodernity Features: 12 Major Features of Postmodernity – Explained!”

<sup>31</sup> ID., “Postmodernity Features: 12 Major Features of Postmodernity – Explained!”

<sup>32</sup> ID., “Postmodernity Features: 12 Major Features of Postmodernity – Explained!”

text, we should keep the plurality, ambiguity and uncertainty of such realities in the society.

While going through the phenomenon of religion in the postmodern context, one is certainly confronted with a whole lot of trends, practices, expressions which defy any neat categorization. Each of the forms of religion that has survived the onslaught of modernity and emerged successfully in the postmodern age needs to be looked at as a unique phenomenon.

Religions have not only survived the difficulties posed by the natural, psychological, philosophical and sociological sciences of the modern age, they have come back with a rich variety and vengeance in the postmodern world. Let us enumerate some of them.

While the attendance of church goers has diminished in some rich European countries, the psychological, social and cultural reasons for attending the church functions, participating in certain religious rituals has not diminished. Many people consider the church functions, the sacraments and the rituals like baptism, marriage and funerals as giving them social integration and moral values to live by<sup>33</sup>. A vague belief in the transcendence marks the religion of these people. They have not left religion altogether. From time to time, the hidden, the forgotten and the dormant religious sentiments surface in their lives.

There are other people who are not satisfied with this half-hearted faith that has been given to them by their religion of birth. They would look for living in a radical manner the faith of their own religions. If their own religions do not offer such possibility, they would even attempt to embrace any other religion that would satisfy their desire to live faith in God in a radical manner. Some have found their way into small evangelical and Pentecostal churches and some others have leaned towards even Asian religions.

### 6.3.1. *The Expressions of Religion in the society*

It is good to remember that there are expressions of religion all over the place. It varies from place to place. In the Indian subcontinent, we see the consultation of the astrologers for marriages, for finding the right moment to file the nominations for the elections, for finding the auspicious day and time for starting of big modern business enterprises by the most educated. It is rather interesting to note that before launching a rocket or a satellite our ultra-modern scientists and technicians do the same in the Indian space research centres. In 2004, the Outlook magazine carried a cover story "Astrology: The Tomorrow Business" which stated that future-telling business was the fastest growing industry with a turnout of Rs. 40 000 Crore per year. It touched, according to the report, the lives of more Indians than ever.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> KEVIN HART, *Postmodernism: A beginner's guide* (ONEWORLD: Oxford), 2006. p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> *The Outlook*, November 22, 2004.

### 6.3.2. *Fundamentalism as an expression of Religion*

We are aware of the different forms of fundamentalism mushrooming in every religion that we know of. It is rather difficult in such expressions to distinguish religion from politics and vested interests. When talking about fundamentalism in the post-modern age, we should not restrict ourselves to Islamic religion. Practically all religions have some streak of fundamentalism, of course with slight variations. Kevin Hart writes regarding the rise of fundamentalism in Christianity in the United States: “(F)undamentalism is a multi-billion-dollar industry in North America, and the New Christian Right has certainly shown itself to be politically effective in Washington, DC, as well as in many state capitals. Fundamentalism is the fast food of American religious life, but for many it feeds an appetite for certainty in a world that is increasingly uncertain... It is quickly becoming the central religious phenomenon of postmodern times.”<sup>35</sup> He also reminds us that fundamentalism is not restricted to the poorly educated and the superstitious, but more than a few scientists are adherents of it.<sup>36</sup>

### 6.3.3. *Syncretic Religion*

In the postmodern age, individuals like to fuse together various elements of local religions as it suits their purpose and taste. This has been the temptation of individuals who do not want to be tied to any one religious structure and dogmatic adherence. This mix and match type of religion has been existing for some time. It is based on the following presuppositions: there are some valuable elements in all religions for happiness; bringing together these elements to form a new synthesis makes one happy; religions are seen in their relevance to human search for happiness. Kevin Hart rightly points out that postmodern syncretism differs from place to place. He says: “They might attend Episcopal Church yet feel quite comfortable folding in meditative practices drawn from Zen Buddhism, adding fringe liturgies devoted to goddess worship, or incorporating spiritual teachings of New Age gurus.”<sup>37</sup> There are serious minded people who are willing to follow Christian Buddhism. In a post-modern world there are no universal religious or ethical laws, everything is shaped by the cultural context of a particular time and place and community. Besides, as we have already hinted at, individuals work with their religious impulses, by selecting the bits of various spiritualities that ‘speak to them’ and create their own internal spiritual world. The inevitable conclusion is that religion is an entirely human-made phenomenon.

<sup>35</sup> KEVIN HART, p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> KEVIN HART, p. 111.

#### 6.3.4. *Virtual Religion (religion without a centre and structure)*

A new phenomenon of religion emerges as various forms of media begin to present elements that suit certain individuals. They begin from what appeals to them without any binding on any one or any structure. There are no fixed sets of belief to be adhered to in accepting such a religion. It is a religion that emerges from nowhere and with no structure. Are there some people who are followers of such a type of religion? It is doubtful. Since it is the individual who makes his 'pick and choose' there can be as many virtual religions as there are individuals who want to follow one. Basically virtual religion is without any reality to found itself.

#### 6.3.5. *Post-modern Religion*

If there are different forms of 'religions in the post-modern context', there are different forms of 'post-modern religion' too. We shall enumerate a few of the trends that have been emerging during the past twenty years. If 'religions in the postmodern context' refers to different forms of religion, 'post-modern religion' refers to interpreting and rethinking religion and its elements in reference to those figures associated, rightly or wrongly, with postmodernism. Kevin Hart divides post-modern religion into three categories: A-theology; radical orthodoxy and non-metaphysical theology.

### 6.4. *Human Subject is a construction*

The identity and the nature of the human being has become problematic in the postmodern world. The clear, conscious and autonomous subject, the thinking thing of the modern period has metamorphosed into just being a point of interjection for activities in the society which are carried out with or without his/her knowledge. Things are happening around the human person. He has no control of himself and neither can he/she have control over things happening around. He is a passive spectator of events that are displayed in different colours. Louis Althusser, the famous theoretician of the French Community Party in the sixties and the seventies, tried to reduce the exalted status of the Subject that it enjoyed in modernity. He says: "ideology has the function of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects."<sup>38</sup>

#### 6.4.1. *A Human being turning Glocal (global and local) in his identity*

It is common knowledge and we assume that every human being is a product of his culture and tradition. As Richard Rorty very rightly points out 'we cannot get

<sup>38</sup> LOUIS ALTHUSSER, "Ideological State of Apparatuses" in Slavoj Zizek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London: Verso, 1994, p. 129.

out of our own skins”. However, this is only part of the story. The human being born in a particular culture, which itself is fluid in the postmodern context, becomes a product of several cultures at the same time. Cultural purity has given rise to cultural hybridity. There isn’t any purity of race and culture. Increasingly individuals realize that they do not belong to any particular culture or race owing to their frequent travels to different parts of the globe, their reading and viewing of different cultural expressions.

#### 6.4.2. *A Human being called to responsibility without the right to choose*

We say that a human being who is not free to choose, but determined by the context, cannot become an ethical subject. Philosophers like Levinas and Derrida have put this conscious ethical subject into question and made it realize that it was being constituted by the appeal of the face of the other in its various forms. The human being is called to responsibility in spite of himself or herself. The human being is not free to choose at will either to accept or reject the appeal of the face of the other. The ethical demand made by the face of the other and the ethical situation awakens the human being from a stupor.

When it comes to choosing moral behaviour, individuals are not choosing consciously what they consider right and wrong, but influenced by the forces at work in the society. I would like to refer to survey made in India on the sexual behaviour of young people. People are surprised that the attitude towards various issues concerning sexual life of the young people, like sex before marriage, swapping of partners, divorce, virginity, abortion, having boyfriends or girlfriends, etc. have changed drastically in the span of a single decade. Whether they accept to be conservatives or liberal, both are motivated by the groups to which they belong. What is important to bear in mind is that the choice of moral standards keep shifting from time to time. Individuals assume several identities at the same time, since forming of the identity itself has become a subtle phenomenon.

#### 6.4.4. *A Human being in search of new identity*

Referring to the adventure-loving mind-set of the young people of the postmodern age, Shweta Thakur Nanda narrates the story of Tushar Agarwal<sup>39</sup>, a software engineer, who left his well-paid job and went on a world tour because it gave him happiness. She concludes this narration with these words about the change that has taken place in Tushar Agrwal: “The techie became a full-time roadie.”<sup>40</sup> The Moral Philosopher Alain Finkielkraut says that a postmodern human person says “Let me do what I want myself!” While this might sound negative and pessimistic we see in the postmodern society how individuals are struggling to form their own identity. In

<sup>39</sup> SHWETA THAKUR NANDA, “D-Day is Today!” in *The Week*, February 1, 2015, pp. 50-59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

the earlier decades the identity was conferred on an individual because of his place of birth and other considerations like language, class, country, etc.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

Having presented the theoretical and explicit characteristics of postmodernity and the practical expressions that have been implicitly accepted by different categories of people in various intensity and degree, it is time to make a few concluding remarks.

- At the outset, it would be good to point out that postmodernity is not a set of principles and doctrines to be accepted in order to enter into its ethos or world. We have also attempted to present postmodernity not as a system like the modern systems of philosophy. We have given some phrases that characterize postmodern ethos. It should be kept in mind that the various phrases that characterize postmodernity might contradict each other. That is not a problem for the postmodern ethos. Contradictions abound in the presentation of postmodernity. That is accepted as its strength. Our life and our thinking are a bit messy and dirty. This is a phenomenon that we need to accept in the postmodern world.
- Some would like to shrink back to old ways of doing things that were clear, familiar and certain. This has been the legitimate desire of people who felt that their life was threatened by the unknown, as if they were reeling under a whirlpool of ideas and images which did not give any direction. Marxism, Capitalism, socialism, democracy, etc. were all clearly defined concepts and realities. The more clearly they were defined the more dangerous and vulnerable they became.
- It is my contention that postmodernity is not a world view that has been put into practice. It is rather postmodernity is presenting a world view that is being lived in the society. The contention is that one is living in a postmodern world in spite of himself or herself.
- Looking for truth and certainty has been the constant search of thinkers in the past and the present. Postmodern ethos presents that such looking for truth and certainty have led to different forms of totalizations, forms of domination and hegemony. Different forms of colonization by wealthy nations and different forms of domination by those in authority and power have not given a voice to those in the margins of the society. The anxieties and worries of the ordinary people or the existential uncertainties were not counted for those in power. The untouchable groups or the marginalized groups did not have a say in the affairs of the world. They were the voiceless people. Those voices have been silenced because they could speak ‘clearly’ and their language was not ‘polished’. Today, postmodernity seems to give a voice for the voiceless, though without any power.

- Equally true is the fact that all through history of philosophy we have had thinkers who did not and could not fit into the various systems, for they pointed out the internal conflicts that did not allow a system to be neat and tidy. They questioned systems that were flawless because they could be flawless only by suppressing dissenting voices.
- Having a set of moral standard, we know, is not a guarantee for right behaviour. Human beings are capable of skirting around those rules and regulations. People can do just a lip service to them. We witness an outright denial of the high ideals in day to day living. In the postmodern world, there is an element of authenticity where people express their inability to be clear about the moral standards. Their ambiguity and doubt about the moral standards is often in contrast with those who hold the moral standards and do not keep them. One is reminded of the two sons of the Gospels: one said no and went and did as his father demanded; the other said yes and went and did not do what was requested of him.
- The provisional nature of the human reality and the systems should be considered as something positive and beneficial. It is true that human beings like to have clearly defined categories to live by. No one likes to live all the time twilight of the dawn or the dusk; they look for the clear day or the night. But, it must be kept in mind that human reality is mixture of light and shadows.
- Postmodernity has given rise to a religion that keeps the feelings and emotions of the human person on tender hooks. The institutional religions have sufficiently drained out the creativity and the imagination of people. Everything had to be neat and tidy and systematic. Postmodernity has given rise to a religion and practice that is unorganized, clumsy put personal. One is reminded of the clarion call of the present head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis: “The Catholic Church must be like a field hospital in a battle field.” Do we realize the precariousness and the provisional nature of the structures Pope Francis appeals to? It is disturbing for those who were used to objective, systematic and orderly way of pursuing such matters in the church. Pope Francis said already at the beginning of his pontificate that he prefers “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church ... concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.”<sup>41</sup>
- Postmodernity is challenging the human person to become morally strong but deprived of all his triumph and glory as an autonomous thinking and conscious Subject that is in control of things, events and persons. These types of persons are the great ‘wounded healers’ that Christian spiritual world knows from the great pastoral theologian Henry Nouwen<sup>42</sup>. These persons are not

<sup>41</sup> Pope FRANCIS, *The Joy of the Gospel*, No. 49. p. 44 (Carmel International Publishing House: Trivandrum, India) 2013.

<sup>42</sup> HENRY J.M. NOUWEN, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (US: Image Book), 1979.

great intellectually, they are not powerful because they hold some authority in the society, but they are morally strong people. Often I am tempted to interpret the 'Super man' concept of Nietzsche in this sense. He is not a stereo type that the society envisions. He/she is a person with a difference, i.e., morally strong but humanly weak in every other way.

Postmodernity is not an ethos in which we lack criteria to do what is morally right. It is true that we do not have a single set of criteria valid for all people and for all times. However, we have all the freedom to follow whatever had been received from the past as values to be upheld, cherished and lived. We need the courage to live by them when many others are doing something else. We do not want to be perceived as different and odd; we want to be the same. It should be borne in mind that this had been the temptation for human beings from time immemorial: to be like others! Swimming against the current requires indomitable courage and conviction. Postmodernity is a challenging invitation to live creatively and optimistically in a world that does not provide the ambient for it. Not to end up in utter despair but to move forward creatively with strong convictions – that is postmodernity.