A Deconstructive Analysis of Derrida's Philosophy

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Abstract
This paper is designed to reveal some of the philosophical ideas of Algerian-born philosopher Jacques Derrida. Jacques Derrida, a leading figure of Post-structuralism and Postmodernism is best known as the founding father of 'Deconstruction' but many of his philosophical ideas such as, logocentrism, differance, phonocentrism, aporia, anti-representationalism, etc. still remain rarely focused. Therefore, in this paper the researcher has tried to explore various philosophical ideas of Derrida before the readers to get acquainted with Derrida's contribution to the world of knowledge. This research work has done with the help of both primary sources i.e., original writings of Derrida and secondary sources including the texts written by others. Here, all of Derrida's ideas are explicitly described and justified by an inductive method. Finally, a concluding remark on deconstruction has been made by comparing Derrida's idea of "Differance" with Nagarjuna's concept of "Emptiness" which left the Indian roots of deconstruction.
Keywords: Deconstruction, Logocentrism, Phonocentrism, Aporia, Anti-representationalism

The Background

The most prolific, erudite and an 'intellectual terrorist' (Searle, 1987) Jacques Derrida was born on July 15, 1930 in El Biar, Algiers, the capital of Algeria. He was born into a Sephardic Jewish family where he experienced an environment of discrimination from his childhood. As a result, when Derrida began his childhood studies, he faced discrimination and humiliation of being a Jewish. In fact, he was withdrawn and expelled rightly from two schools and the reasons were, First, the first school he wanted to attend had 7% reservation of seats for the Jewish community and this time the reservation of percentage had already been exceeded in numbers. Second, he was expelled from another school because of anti-Sephardic rule and was being a minority Jew, he was unable to continue his studies. Then he dropped out of a school for a year and joined a football team and participated in different football matches. The injustice and unfairness that he experienced in his childhood would lead him to become a world-famous philosopher and to establish an important position in the galaxy of philosophical discourses.

It was in 1966 a colloquium held at Johns Hopkins University, USA and Jacques Derrida was invited for the first time to deliver a paper on structuralism. In that Colloquium, Derrida was presented a paper called "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science", then the entire intelligentsia

including Michel Foucault, Jacques Lecan, Poul de Man, and others were surprised to know that for the first time an entirely new view would come to see the world in a different way. From this day on, Derrida began to gain international reputation and fame. Finally, in 1967 he came to publish three of his major books, namely, 'Of Grammatology', 'Writing and Difference', and 'Speech and Phenomena'. These publications gave him a renowned place to establish himself as a philosopher of the postmodern world.

Rationale of the Study

A critical analysis of the literature studies revealed that a large number of studies have been carried out worldwide in relation to Derrida and literature (Kronick, 1999; Miller, 2001; Culler, 2005; Bennington, 2014) and his theory of deconstruction in the field of literary criticism and critical theory (Hills, 1992; Wolfreys, 1998; Zima, 2002), writing and approaching poetry (Rorty, 1978; Hirata, 1992; Culler, 2002; Gersh, 2006; Myer, 2007; Biesta and Kuebne, 2005), political theories and its implications (Macdonald, 1999; Bennington, 2001 & 2014; Critchley, 1999 & 2006; Leitch, 2007; McQuillan, 2007; Peters and Biesta, 2009; Beardsworth, 2013; Dinan, 2014), feminist studies (Poovey, 1988; Scott, 1988), ethical, cultural, and architectural studies (Wigley, 1987; Wiseman, 1995; Jarvis, 1992; Critchley, 2006; Bennington, 2014; Hoteit, 2015; Fleming, 2016; Ranciere, 2020), deconstruction and community development along with organizational and social analysis (Cooper, 1984; Westoby, 2019; Westoby and Harris, 2020), sociological, anthropological and historical studies (Danato and Said, 1979; Spencer and Barth, 1992; Agger, 1994; Kleinberg, 2007; Zeitlyn, 2012), religion and theological discourses (Shakespeare, 1998; Collins, 2000; MacPhee, 2003; Almond, 2004), deconstruction and Marginalized music education (Dyndahl, 2008). From the above reviews, It can be seen that almost all researchers and academicians have used only one idea of Derrida, which is "deconstruction" in all areas of studies ranging from literature to history to sociology and so on. However, but few researchers found that Derrida's writings were more philosophical then literary (Gerhart and Man, 1983; Norris, 1987; Gaston, 2005; Burik, 2009)

thus present paper has designed to unfold the rarely discussed philosophical ideas of Jacques Derrida.

Objective of the Study

To explore the philosophical ideas of Jacques Derrida.

Method

In this present endeavor the Inductive method has been used to delineate all the philosophical thoughts and ideas of French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

Sources of Extracting Ideas

In this research both primary sources including original works of Derrida and secondary sources as books written by others, related articles and journals have been used explictly to induce and articulate all important philosophical ideas of Jacques Derrida.

Philosophical Ideas of Derrida

All the philosophical ideas and thoughts of Jacques Derrida have been analyzed and demonstrated in a simpler manner as follows:

Metaphysics of Absence

The metaphysics of presence is one the foundational axiom of western philosophy as well as one of the oldest western intellectual tradition. In order to understand metaphysics of presence, it is essential to understand the idea of time as described by Aristotle in his book "Physics". Aristotle said, "Time is a number of movements in respect of before and after". He considered time as a number which would refer to the number of movements, motions, etc. And this number could be anything like number of minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, decades and centuries in respect of the past and the future. This is what Aristotle's way of bringing the present or privileging the present against the past and the future, or making the present something of paramount importance. This definition of Aristotle was seen as the starting point of metaphysics of presence (reference point) in western philosophy.

Derrida, On the other hand, was of the view that the entire western philosophical tradition started from Plato to Husserl had been dominated by metaphysics of presence. It was generally thought that metaphysics

was not only just a sub branch of philosophy, but rather the root of philosophy (Stocker, 2006). To demolish the idea of 'Metaphysics of presence' by "Metaphysics of absence", Derrida took the help of Martin Heidegger who said, "western philosophy has contingently privileged what is, or that which appears and has forgotten to pay attention about the condition for that appearance" (Heidegger, 1953). This privilege of presence over absence created a hierarchy in philosophy such as, theory/practice, mind/body, good/evil, pure/impure, simple/complex, speech/writing and so on. These hierarchies always created a gap between two things and privileged the first one to be superior than the second one. For example, 'speech' it is said that when a speaker delivers something, listeners are present before the speaker and through speech truth can be easily revealed with clarity but when a reader reads any kind of text the author is absent for the reader, hence, speech is considered as more important than writing. It was said that such hierarchies should be broken and reversed because both speech and writing would be complementary to each other. Similarly, the present can only be understood with the help of the past and the future. It would therefore be correct to say not 'metaphysics of presence' but "metaphysics of absence" simply indicated that the present must be defined in terms of past and future, and the hierarchies existed in philosophy since long need to be demolished.

Anti-Logocentrism

The idea of the 'metaphysics of presence' led to another important concept that is Logocentrism. The concept of logos was found in the works of Plato and Aristotle. According to Aristotle, "logos is the ultimate truth" (Poetics). But it is found that logos itself was a very confusing word in western philosophy which stood for 'God', 'Presence', 'Centre', 'Morality', 'Value', 'Reason' (Derrida, 1982, p.ix) and also referred to "comprehensive mind", "discourse", "language", etc. (Powell, 1997). These concepts always occupied a central position in almost all western philosophical traditions and in all human discourses. So, Derrida challenged the centralities of these concepts and maintained that there is no god and no Centre in the universe.

Logocentrism believes that there is an objective truth, there is an objective reality and language, words in language can capture the meaning of objective truth and reality. For instance, let us take a mountain. The object mountain exists and there is a word in English language which signifies the object mountain, but the object mountain existed even before the English language responded to it with a word and also it existed independently of the English language. Because the object mountain could have been called in a different way before the English language came into existence. Consequently, the belief that there is an ultimate reality or truth underpinning all human thoughts, words and actions is thus rejected because language is fundamentally incapable of reflecting accurately the nature of reality. There is no universal truth because truth is contingent or contextual. The Human beings had always a quest for truth or center of something and the notion of our truth was always dependent upon the idea of Centre or presence of something but there is no real Centre of human beings as human identity changes over time to time, place to place, and circumstances to circumstances. Thus, it is vague to seek and put God, reason, presence, speech and morality at the Centre. The concept of 'centrism' in logocentrism had always been searching for a Centre but Derrida came with his idea of 'decentering' which removed the desire of human beings to search any Centre (Derrida, 1976). Thus, not centered but through "Decentrism" the subjective nature of human beings could be understood.

Dismantling Idea of Phonocentrism

The phonocentric belief has been a matter of debate since the time from Plato to Rousseau to Saussure to Levi Strauss and later it was created a hierarchy between speech and writing. Derrida claimed that thinkers like Plato, Rousseau, Saussure, and Strauss had degraded writing or written word and claimed that it was only through speech or spoken word the real/pure meaning could have been conveyed. He believed that the western intellectual tradition including philosophy, literature, linguistics, anthropology was extremely phonocentric. Phonocentrism is the tendency to claim that speech is inherently superior than writing because speech

is closed to reality. On the other hand, writing is inferior and far from the truth and reality because in writing the writer is not present before the readers. Aristotle said, "Spoken words are symbol of mental experience and written words are symbols of spoken words" (Aristotle, 1996). Similarly, Saussure says, "speech is the signifier of meaning while writing is the signifier of the signifier" (Saussure, 2011). Therefore, for both Aristotle and Saussure speech was more important to convey the truth immediately than writing. Derrida vehemently criticized Saussure's view that "Sound is intimately connected to our thoughts than the written words" and said writing could retain its purity during the ages while speech is incapable of doing that. However, it would be impossible to say that speech is more important and writing is less. Instead, it should be accepted that both are equally important in simplifying the complexities of language.

Deconstruction: A New approach to Philosophy

Around 1960, Jacques Derrida developed a new theory called 'Deconstruction' to break the oppositional, dualistic or hierarchical system existed in the western metaphysics which began with Plato. This idea of deconstruction had been derived from the concept of 'Destruktion' of the famous German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (Heidegger, 1962, pp.67-72). Deconstruction had two aspects such as literary and philosophical. The first one concerned on finding out the hidden meaning of the texts in terms of 'critical analysis of the text', while the second one focused on breaking or demolishing the hierarchy or dichotomy that privileges one idea over another, one concept over another, one philosophy over another and so on. The main aim of deconstruction was to reject the metaphysical assumptions that created hierarchical positions. Western metaphysics created a dualist ideology such as presence/absence, speech/ writing, good/evil, true/false, truth/error, identity/ difference, mind/matter, subject/object, being/ nothingness, man/woman, soul/body, life/death, nature/culture, white/black, etc. (Derrida, 1972, p.viii). Thus, started from Plato to Rousseau all other philosophers followed the same path, treating the first as important by rejecting the second. Not only the philosophers but also the thinking of the people's and

their day today activities developed in this way. For example, if a child likes to wear black from an early age, he/she would always prefer black color instead of preferring other colors such as green, yellow, blue, violet, pink, red, or something else because he/she has an excessive tendency towards black because he/she has already ignored other colors much before. In the similar fashion, the western metaphysical tradition always tried to give privilege to the first one which was considered as more important and superior than its counterparts. Derrida's approach of deconstruction was a tendency to break this chain of hierarchies and made a condition where no hierarchy would exist further. Here, deconstruction didn't mean destruction, rather anything that had been constructed before must be deconstructed i.e., scientific theories, great philosophies, concepts, historical ideas, so that the pre-exist belief of human mind would be changed. Moreover, Derrida attempted to "expose the binaries/dualism and deconstruct them without privileging one component over the other by asserting the truth of the uncertain hesitant" (Balkin, 1994).

Difference: A Concept without Finality

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida used the concept of 'difference' several times in most of his texts such as, "The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond" (Derrida, 1987, p.2,9,12), "Of Grammatology" (Derrida, 1976, p.xxix, 62-63), "The Margin of Philosophy" (Derrida, 1982, p.8,13,18-19) and "Speech and Phenomenon" (Derrida, 1973, pp.148-149). The word difference came from the French word 'differer' which meant both 'differ' and 'defer'. The concept of difference has two fundamental features that is 'to differ' and 'to defer' (Derrida, 1981, p.ix). The meaning of word "differ" means "to distinguish" or "to be different" or "to be unlike" from other and the second term "defer" means "to postpone" or "schedule to a later point of time". Once in 1981, Derrida visited Edinburg where he was interviewed by two faculties at the university of Dandee namely, James Kearns and Ken Newton. James Kearns started asking questions about the concept of difference and requested him to clarify the meaning of the term "difference". Derrida would simply answer his questions by saying that 'difference

is nothing but postal relay of delay' (Reported from Dash, 2000). The theory of differance was a revolt against the philosopher-cum-structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss. Further, Saussure had given the "concept of sign" in his book 'Course in general linguistics' (Saussure, 2011), where he said sign (object/thing) is made of two things, such as the signifier (Sound/word) and the signified (mental concept). According to Saussure, there is a relationship between the signifier and the signified and the signifier is more important than the signified. For example, the word dog, here a signifier is the sound or word of dog, while signified is the mental image that is created after listing the word dog, which can refer any kind of dog. Thus, for Saussure, language was more important to understand the meaning. Levi Strauss, another important contributor to structuralism gave the concept of 'binary oppositions' (Strauss, 1978), where he said in order to understand the meaning of any concept, we need to understand from its opposite. For example, to understand day, one needs to understand night, to understand good one needs to understand evil and so on. The entire theory of Saussure and Strauss was rejected by Jacques Derrida and for Derrida, the meaning of no word has its final meaning because when we search the meaning of any word, we do not get the meaning, rather we find a set of words and each word of this set is to be investigated further and produces a fresh group of words and this goes on and on and thus the change of the signifier is infinite/endless. For instance, if someone decides to search the word 'wife' in the Cambridge English Dictionary, the CED says that 'wife means the woman that you are married to', again what is the meaning of the word woman? The same dictionary says a "woman means an adult human female being". Further, what is the meaning of the word adult? The dictionary explains 'a person or animal that is grown to full size and strength' again the word person means "a man, woman or child". Thus, one can go on and on and still doesn't be able to obtain the meaning of the word wife. However, it can be inferred that the truth or meaning of a word is constantly changing, and no final truth or meaning can come into existence in any discipline, be it arts, philosophy, humanities, literature, history, etc.

Anti-Phallogocentrism

The Algerian born philosopher Jacques Derrida denounced the idea of Phallocentrism in western philosophy. It is evident that Phallus or male or masculinity was always privileged for constructing and disseminating knowledge in the society. Males had always been taken the central positions in society and created a patriarchal culture over the years. Not only in philosophy, but also in sociology and history dominance was observed between masculinists and feminists where one always dominated the other. Similarly, the entire western philosophical tradition started from Greek to the modern philosophy was dominated by men. As a result, the ideologies of male philosophers were reflected in almost all schools of philosophy but the role of women disappeared. Similarly, the second half of the term of Phallocentrism claimed that language is always at the Centre to convey the meaning. However, Derrida merged two concepts, namely, phallocentrism and logocentrism into one and gave it a new name called 'Phallogocentrism". Here, going one step further to Derrida a new idea can be put into practice, such as the idea of Anti-Phallogocentrism. For example, nowadays it is observed that women compete equally with men in all fields starting from studies to jobs and even in certain ground women have surpassed men. So, the distinction between men and women is not visible to this extent today. Now women are able to do all kinds of work, they are involved in the decision-making process, they are more skilled and laborious, they can equally disseminate knowledge to the world whereby the phallogocentric belief of the west will be broken.

Aporia- A Deadlock Conclusion

The concept of 'aporia' is mostly used in the field of literature to show that there is a moment of 'puzzle' or 'undecidability' when the reader tries to convey the meaning of a word. But here, the discussion of the term aporia is confined to philosophy, as Derrida had not mentioned it in a philosophical sense (Derrida, 1982). Hegel, a German philosopher spoke of the dialectical method in his book "Science of Logic" (1812) and asserted that the whole philosophical discourse or history is the evolution of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis leading to a final truth or

conclusion. And according to Hegel this process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis went through a circular process. Derrida was of the view that "Hegel articulated the circle as his central theme" which also puts him under the category of logocentrists' (Derrida, 1976, p.xxiii,25-26,39-41). Furthermore, Derrida argued that aporia is a deadlock of conclusion where thesis and antithesis remain opposite to each other without any possibility of synthesis. He rejected the idea of "circularity" and "continuity" found in the Hegelian concept. It can be said that the process of history is not circular, because history constituted of ruptures and gaps in events (Derrida, 1966). Thus, when someone tries to understand history through a circular way he will arrive at a particular truth or conclusion but aporia in history can lead human beings to different conclusions simultaneously.

Epistemological Justification

Derrida through his various works didn't speak directly about the origin and nature of knowledge, but so far, the idea of deconstruction is concerned, it can be inferred that the primary goal of deconstruction was not to destroy the truth or the concept like God because deconstruction does not try to answer whether truth/god exists or not, but rather it attempted to see how truth has been constructed? Why it is constructed? Who constructed it? and for what reasons? Therefore, Derrida tried to find a way to understand how truth had been constructed. Further he said, "the history of science", "the philosophy of social science" and "the nature of consciousness" were the three point of reference where Derrida attempted to justify the formation of knowledge (Stocker, 2006, p.97). Criticizing Husserl, Kant, Descartes, Spinoza and Pascal, Derrida claimed that there is no foundation or origin of knowledge, but is emerged through paradoxes which are against the theory of "Foundationalism" and "Coherentism" (Stocker, 2006, p.103). For Derrida, "there is no knowledge as a whole or totality or structure", hence truth can be made without any universal ground, foundation, presence of the subject, coherence, Centre, and origin.

Anti-Representationalism a Revolt against Representationalism

Analytic and Continental European philosophy were centered around the idea of representationalism, where metaphysics always to be considered as consciously present being or subject. This consciousness divided philosophy into different schools with different ideas and principles. The philosophers of the ages tried to define being through consciousness, but Derrida said the word Being itself is not clear because it is made up of the word "Be+Ing". First, "be" means something which is done or completed and second "ing" refers to a continuous process. Hence, the word being itself shows that there is no similarity, it meant you are something at the same time you are also becoming. The concept of being itself is unclear because consciousness as well as meaning were not represented clearly. There is always a "gap, trace, breach between what someone is trying to represent and what he/she is actually representing" (Derrida, 1976, p.62). Truth cannot be fully represented through conscious mind instead it can be represented in different ways through sub-conscious and unconscious acts (Rorty, 1979).

Derrida and Idea of Sovereignty

Derrida throughout his intellectual career spoke very little about the concepts like sovereignty, ethics and humanism. Not directly speaking but referring to Bataille (a French philosopher) he would rightly say that "sovereignty in true sense refers to the triumph over negativity and limitations" (Stocker, 2006, p.133). Adhering to this point, it can be said that every human being should try to take the negative situation as an opportunity or blessing to purify one self and overcome all kinds of limitations.

Derrida and Religion

Derrida was quite agnostic about the concepts like God and Religion. Just as a text did not have one fixed meaning and unleashed other possibilities of meaning inside. Similarly, no religion of this world has some fixed religious laws, rather all laws must be further interpreted and reinterpreted so that the origin of all religious laws can be unfolded without reference to God. Therefore, Derrida tried to say "Do not take God as an absolute being of all religions

and laws, rather try to search all laws and its origin culturally" (Stocker, 2006, p.139).

Derrida and Ethics

For Derrida, ethics should not be understood in terms of pure good and pure evil because there is no such concept of purity and impurity as human mind always strived to become pure in all spectrum of life. Being an epistemological relativist (Stocker, 2006, p.127), Derrida vehemently criticized Rousseau and Levinas for comparing good against bad, nature against society, natural against unnatural, and nonviolence against violence in order to claim their ethical/moral positions. But Derrida's ethical consideration went beyond the mere conception of good and evil. Further, he argued that in order to go beyond the notion of good and evil, one had to establish a relation with oneself (Derrida, 1973 and 1978), next, good could not exist without evil thus both were vice-versa.

Derrida and Aesthetics

Derrida was with the opinion that Aesthetics had always been considered as a subordinate of ethics (Derrida, 1987). Two important works of Derrida such as, "Of Grammatology" (1976) and "The Truth in Painting" (1987) emphasized the magnitude of aesthetics with regard to the relationship between philosophy and literature. Furthermore, in literature metaphor is used as a poetic device to highlight the internal and external meaning of a word, while in philosophy the use of metaphor had not yet been known but it supposed to say that "metaphors are the ornaments of philosophical ideas" (Stocker, 2006, p,147). Derrida's distinct writing style revealed that all his philosophical ideas had some aesthetics fragrances (Stocker, 2006, p.145). Just as language, epistemology, logic, ethics, political philosophy, and metaphysics have their own worth, aesthetics must be recognized as an essential discipline of philosophy to represent human culture and daily lives along with other kinds of art works without absoluteness. By collapsing the distinction between philosophy and literature it could be said that the interrelationship between words and concepts, metaphorical and philosophical will help to prioritize the importance of aesthetics in all subject of studies.

Derrida and Humanism

Addressing three philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl and, Heidegger (Three H's) on one side and Jean Paul Sartre on the other hand, Derrida tried to highlight the idea of humanism more radically. He attacked the idea of metaphysical humanism which replaced the centrality of God and placed man at the Centre. The Margin of Philosophy (Derrida, 1982), a famous work by Derrida where he insisted that humanism could not be considered as humanity because the entire western philosophical tradition had always privileged men over women, resulted in a patriarchal ideology embedded in European philosophy. So, Derrida's concern was not only to break the hierarchy, but also to dismantle the whole hierarchical ways of thinking that could cause human beings to live with full freedom as a human being but not as a metaphysical human.

Concluding Remarks on the Indian Root of Deconstruction

Deconstruction (Derrida, 1976) is a very original methodology of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, but the fact is that deconstruction was being practiced in India nearly 2000 years before Derrida and the practitioner was the Buddhist monk Acharya Nagarjuna, an important figure of Buddhism. After Buddha who lived in India during the second century (Westerhoff, 2009). The pivotal term or concept in deconstruction is differance. The concept of differance states that every word gets its meaning because it differs from every other word. And it also tells that because of the very nature of language it is not possible for human beings to reach the final meaning / truth / reality of a word (Derrida, 1976, p.xliii). Therefore, we are compelled to defer the final meaning of a word. Nagarjuna developed the concept of "emptiness" (Garfield, 1995), he believed in the interdependence of all things and claimed that nothing has self-existence or self-presence because everything including all concepts is dependent upon everything else. "Sunyata" or "emptiness" is the exhaustion of all theories and all interpretations. Nagarjuna pointed out that the meaning of emptiness itself is relative and having used emptiness to let go other concepts thus human beings should let go emptiness too (Kalupahana, 1975).

Derrida concept of difference has two fundamental aspects, the first of these is that a word gets its meaning because it differs from other words, the second is that the final meaning of a word can never be reached. We are always compelled to postpone our knowledge of the final meaning of a word. Thus, it is pertinent to note that both these aspects are present in the concept of "emptiness" developed by Nagarjuna. He further said that not words but also all things are interdependent and nothing in this universe is self-existence or self-presence (Nishijima and Warner, 2011). He also believed that the principle of "Sunyata" leads to the exhaustion of all theories, views, and interpretations. Nagarjuna went a step further to Derrida and declared that all our experiences of the phenomenal world work under the constant illusion of perceiving things they are really nothing but emptiness. Both Derrida and Nagarjuna refused to put forward views of their own, they demolished the ideologies of others but claimed that they had no ideology of their own to offer because both differance and emptiness are dynamic forces that serve to undermine rigid patterns of thinking. However, Derrida dazzled the world with the theory and practice of deconstruction and the world believed that what Derrida was offering was not only brilliant but also original but now it appears that much of what was said by Derrida had already been said by Acharya Nagarjuna some two thousand years before Derrida. Despite its brilliance originality, deconstruction is ultimately nothing but "old wine in a new bottle".

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