

Study Material

Department of English

Name of the course: EM 18 LITERARY THEORIES-II

NAME OF THE MODULE: STRUCTURALISM LECTURE -2

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- Though Structuralism and Formalism are highly differentiated theoretical fields, they share a commitment to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) outlined a **theory of the sign** that transformed not only linguistics, but nearly every branch of the humanities and the social sciences.
- To some degree the relation between Formalism and Structuralism is historical, for it is possible to discern a progression from formalist studies of language and written forms to structuralist studies of society and culture.
- Though structuralist and formalist thought has been criticized for its inflexibility [the rigid assertion that everything is constructed and every sense emanates from the relationship between parts/ units of structure], the notions of *form* and *structure* are actually quite elastic.
- Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century linguistics had concentrated on the study of grammar and philology, which emphasized logic and historical development, while comparative linguistics focused on analogy and homology. Saussure believed that language was more complex. For him, language “involves an established system and an evolution. At any given time it is an institution in the present and a product of the past”.
- His work is mainly concerned with the difference between *langue* and *parole*, a difference, he argues, that enables us to

distinguish what is social from what is individual and what is essential from what is particular and concrete. *Langue* constitutes a system. By contrast, *parole* “is an individual act”. For example, the abstract grammar of a language is an element that we can refer to as *langue* but the different age groups of that language belonging to different classes, genders , professions , cultural neighbourhoods speak the same language differently, some using slangs and some very formal.