Study Material

Department of English

Name of the course: EM 18 LITERARY THEORIES-II

NAME OF THE MODULE: STRUCTURALISM LECTURE -1

DR SAUNAK SAMAJDAR

KINDLY GO THROUGH THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY. MORE EXPLANATION AND AUDIO/VIDEO-LEECTURES WOULD FOLLOW .

- **Structuralism is a 20th Century approach to the human**

sciences .

- **It has had a profound effect on linguistics, sociology, anthropology and other**

fields like critical analysis of literary and artistic texts that attempts to analyze a specific

field as a complex system of interrelated parts.

- **Broadly speaking, Structuralism holds that all human activity and its products,   even perception and thought itself, are** **constructed**

and not natural, and in particular that everything has meaning because of the language   system in which we operate.

- **It is closely related to Semiotics, the study of signs, symbols and communication,   and how meaning is constructedand understood.**
- **There are four main common ideas underlying Structuralism as a general movement**
- **firstly, every system has a structure;**
- **secondly, the structure is what determines the position of each element of a whole;**
- **thirdly, "structural laws" deal with coexistence rather than changes; and**
- **fourthly, structures are the "real things" that lie beneath the surface or the appearance of meaning.**

\

- **Structuralism is widely regarded to have its origins in the work of the Swiss linguis-tic theorist Ferdinand de Saussure(1857 - 1913) in the early 20th Century, but it soon came to be applied to many other fields, including philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, literary theory and even mathematics.**

- **In the early 20th Century, Saussure developed a science of signs based on linguistics (semiotics or semiology). He held that any language is just a complex system of signs that express ideas, with rules which govern their usage. He called the underlying abstract, general and permanent structure of a language, "langue", and the concrete and particular manifestations or instances in use, "parole".**

- **He concluded that any individual sign is essentially arbitrary, and that there is no natural relationship between a signifier (e.g. the word or sound "dog") and the signified(e.g. the mental concept of the actual animal that is conveyed by the sound "dog"). If the word and meaning were rationally related, then there would be same names or words for same things in all languages.**

- **Unlike the Romantic or Humanist models, which hold that the author is the starting point or progenitor of any text, Structuralism argues that any piece of writing (or any "signifying system") has no origin, and that authors merely inhabit pre-existing structures("langue") that enable them to make any particular sentence or story ("parole"), hence the idea that "language speaks us", rather than that we speak language.**