CHAPTER - IV

METANARRATIVE AND LOCAL NARRATIVE: JEAN-FRANCOIS LYOTARD
Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) is most renowned personality in postmodern era. His *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge* is the major contribution to the postmodernism. Born in 1926 in Verslise in France, philosopher by profession he is among those who have contributed to the development of postmodernity as non-sociologists. He got his higher education in Paris University and excelled in philosophy. He has written quite a few books but his contribution to postmodernism cannot be ignored. All of his works including *Postmodern Condition* are written in French but have largely been translated into English. *Postmodern Condition*, his well-known treatise, though very small in size, occupies an important place in the postmodern literature. In this book Lyotard has claimed that transformations, both in society and in the production of knowledge, make postmodern rethinking both inevitable and necessary. The major theme of Lyotard’s books has been to criticize and condemn the Order theories of Marxism, Parsons, and other. Lyotard rejected the order theories of metanarratives or foundational theories of religion, science, politics and art, music, media in recently. The order theories of Spencer, Comte, Durkheim, Merton, Parsons, and Sumner have silenced us into belief that we are part of a ‘real’ social order which protects, balances, and regulates our activities. ‘Conflict’ theories from Marx, Simmel, Mills to Marcuse and Habermas, while revealing that all was not right with this ‘ordered’ world, have reaffirmed the possibility of a re-ordered right world. Marxist, neo-Marxist theorists present the hope that some group-the workers, the students, or the new professional class-may bring about a more just social
order. For him, postmodernism is not a new epoch, the beginning of a new era. It is a recurrent historical phase within modernists. As he puts it, the postmodern is “undoubtedly part of the modern” (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1988, 72). A work can become modern only when it is first postmodern. In his book, Postmodern Condition, Lyotard explains the meaning of postmodern in the following words: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1984, xxiv). This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in sciences: but progress in turn presupposes it. About totalization of society Lyotard attacks the entire emancipator and scientific grand-narrative associated with the enlightenment. Postmodernism involves a severe re-examination of the thought of the enlightenment. Lyotard has written much on postmodernity and science narratives in his works. Postmodernism is a term used to encompass a wide range of attitudes. It can be said to be immediately relevant to the realms of the arts, philosophy, politics and sociology. Postmodernism is a label given to a time period in which the abrupt influx of technology and ever-increasing cultural multiplicity must be met with new methods of representation. The postmodernist employs it with a tone of exhilaration and liberation (Barry, 2002: 84).

The beginning of the postmodern debate essentially began in 1979 with the publication of the essay The Postmodern Condition (translated into English in 1984) by French literary theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard is widely regarded as one of the most influential postmodern theorists. Basically he conceives postmodernism as a war against cultural and theoretical agreement and ideological unity, as propounded by social theorist Jurgen Habermas in his defense of modernity: Modernity an Incomplete Project, (1980). In his essays, The Postmodern Condition and What is Postmodernism? (1982), Lyotard attacks the totalizing
sensibilities of the Enlightenment which is the way of the modern movement according to Habermas. Lyotard targets the Enlightenment’s authoritative explanations of the world and challenges Habermas’s call for an end to “artistic experimentation” and for “order … unity, for identity, for security” (Lyotard, 1993, 40). The unity which Habermas desires is discharged by Lyotard as an illusion which suppress the ever-increasing plurality of contemporary culture. This dismissal is the basis for his theory of grand narratives, or metanarratives.

Lyotard believes knowledge has become a commodity and consequently a means of empowerment. He sees knowledge as being communicated through narratives, or different ways of interpreting the world. Grand narratives are authoritative, establishing their political or cultural views as absolute truths beyond any means of criticism. They have a totalizing effect on the culture, reducing it to universal codes which usurp their local counterparts. In a culture driven by grand narratives, the ideology of the predominant regime essentially has a monopoly on knowledge, which Lyotard opposes by calling for a new world of knowledge based on mininarratives. Mininarratives do not contain any universal truths but together they form a body of knowledge more adept at describing the contemporary condition than the generalizing ideologies of grand narratives. For Lyotard, the postmodern culture distances itself from this centralizing effect on knowledge, thus removing the need for the epistemological hierarchy which cultural or political movements such as modernism and Marxism seem to enforce. Lyotard announces that “the grand narrative has lost its credibility” (Lyotard, 1984, 37), praising local and temporary knowledge instead. This is the stage onto which the postmodern artist or writer emerges, each contributing her or his own mininarrative in the form of liberating postmodern expressions. The French academia can be said to be the
cradle of the postmodern movement as a theoretical discipline, with Lyotard having first established the significance of the postmodern condition in the late 1970s.

Lyotard’s The Postmodern Condition is a short essay consists of Lyotard’s intellectual context regarding status of knowledge in the contemporary world. As Lyotard tells us in his opening sentence, the book is concerned with ‘the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies.’ (Ibid. xxii) That is to distinguish the condition of knowledge from the general cultural condition of postmodernism, which he defines in the crudest sense as ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’, (Ibid. xxiv) and reveals how Knowledge has, up until the end of the 1950’s (Ibid. 3) been legitimated by the metanarratives of science. It contributed to human freedom and well-being. He examines developments in the nature and circulation of knowledge since the end of World War II, and persists that this has led to the dishonour of the Enlightenment narrative of emancipation and progress. Lyotard was commissioned by the Canadian government to submit a report on the status of knowledge in the most highly developed societies in the west. Lyotard uses the word ‘postmodern’ to describe the state of knowledge. He writes:

“The object of this study is the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word ‘postmodern’ to describe that condition. The word is in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics; it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rule for science, literature, and the arts” (Ibid. xxii).

Lyotard further remarks: “Our working hypothesis is that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is knowledge as the post-
industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (Ibid. 3).

Thus, according to Lyotard, postmodernism is a movement, a transition that has been under way. It has a reference to a vast field of activities ranging from dance, drama, art and architecture to culture, women’s movements, film and literal studies.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard has raised certain questions on the state of knowledge: How forms of knowledge come into being? Who controls knowledge? And, who has access to it? In culture and society, scientific disciplines no longer assume that time theories and discoveries have universal or timeless value (Ibid. 3).

Lyotard dwells on scientific knowledge and knowledge related to human emancipation of the kind initiated by enlightenment and modernity. It is the urge to find out the nature and form of knowledge which enables him to criticize the metanarratives of social sciences, in other words, Lyotard’s concept of posmodernity lies in the rejection of metanarratives.

Postmodernity is continuation of modernity. The postmodern era is not the beginning of a new era. It is the continuation of modern era. Lyotard very strongly argues that postmodernity is a part of modernity. He says that we have had postmodern phases before modernism. Postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but a nascent state, and this state is recurrent.

Postmodernity is a process, a movement. Basically, postmodernity is a kind of social movement. When there is any kind of disenchantment with modernity, the postmodernity emerges. The postmodern condition mainly focuses on science. Lyotard informs that the present society is in such a frightening state of despair that the only solution lies in the coming of postmodernity. Lyotard argues that there
cannot be a universal or timeless body of knowledge. Lyotard rejects the metanarrative or meganarratives and their characteristics. He says that the underlying assumption of both scientific and cultural narratives is that all the societies are uniform and their ethnicity, identity and problems are the same. This assumption of metaarratives is not acceptable to Lyotard. The societies and their kit of knowledge are in a damaging state of affairs. They have become unrepairable and degenerated. And, on the other hand, the metanarratives and the theories propounded by their authors have failed to do justice to the mankind.

The grand narratives are also called meta-narratives or meganarratives by Lyotard. The thing, which is told or narrated, is narrative. For instance, a story is narrated. There is a technical meaning of narratives in Lyotard’s conceptualization.

Marxism and functionalism are examples of metanarratives. Postmodernists reject such ‘grand theories’, arguing that is impossible to identify any fundamental truths underpinning human society. He sees the distinction between scientific knowledge and non-scientific narrative. He takes hold of science that has no ‘metalegitimation’, it must have alternative to narrative for that legitimation, that is a non-scientific legitimation. Since both narrative and scientific knowledge have a common foundation of legitimation in narrative they are equally valid. As Smith writes, “Postmodernism is not incredulity toward narrative or myth; on the contrary, it reveals that all knowledge is grounded in such” (Smith, 2005 cited in Robinson, 2005, Web Blog)

Types of metanarratives include Emancipatory, and scientific, Emancipatory metanarratives are associated with the notion of reason, experience, scepticism of religion and traditional authority. Lyotard argues that these emancipator metanarratives (functionalism and Marxism) are responsible for creating possibility of war, totalitarianism,
and gap between the rich and the poor. The degeneration in education, environment and employment are all results of metanarratives.

Scientific narratives attract greater attention of Lyotard. Actually, these constitute the term of his enquiry. One very bold observation of Lyotard in this connection is that there is no truth in scientific knowledge. Science has no direct access to truth. “Scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge which I will call narrative in the interests of simplicity” (Ibid. 7).

Thus truth is limited by the institutions in which it is created. Truth can never be universal, nor can it be timeless. Metanarratives are totalistic only.

Lyotard considers the metatheories of conflict and functionalism as totalistic theories. Totalization means comprising or study of the whole or entirety. Functionalism is universal. It stands for an ‘ordered’ society. The history of all the societies is the history of class war. The totalistic theories exercised their dominance during the period of modernization. Functionalism preached the ideology of capitalism, elitism, totalitarianism, and in short, status quoism. Marxism, on the other hand, promised for a classless and stateless socialism. Lyotard declared a war on totalizing metanarratives. It is time to make ‘war’ on such totalistic perspectives. And, modernity is pre-eminent of grand narratives. He calls it wage a war on totality. He announced by saying that let they should wage a war on totality; let they should be witness to the unpresentable; activate the differences and save the honor of the name. It is the kind of system that Lyotard describes and opposes in *The Postmodern Condition*. When knowledge becomes hierarchical as it is in Springfield, only ideas from select groups will be admissible into the collective body of canonical knowledge. It is in authority’s best interest to encourage the
consensus of ideas because this enables it to maintain its power, and with such consensus comes totalizing systems of knowledge, or metanarratives. Metanarratives exclude those sectors of society that are not situated at the top of the knowledge hierarchy. For example the Springfield Historical Society, has already legitimized its knowledge? In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard proposes a different system of knowledge, wherein hierarchy is replaced by a flat network of areas of inquiry, which would include contributions from the society. Instead of the homogenizing metanarratives, there would be a series of local narratives, or mininarratives, which are temporary and contingent, unlike metanarratives. For Lyotard, that “consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value” (Lyotard, 1979, 66).

Metanarratives have legitimization. The tragedy of the modern society is that it has given full legitimacy to the hegemony of metanarratives. The kind of democratic order, which is never for the people or, by the genuine people that we have today all over the world, is legitimized by the metanarratives. Lyotard refers to the destruction of Jews by the Nazis. Their destruction is supported by the metanarrative theory of the superiority of Aryan race as claimed by Hitler. Metanarratives are never neutral; they are invariably partial and prejudicial. And, these narratives have enjoyed the legitimacy of the society, the state, and above all, the intellectuals. The sublime feeling is neither moral universality nor aesthetic universalization, but is, rather, the destruction of one by the other in the violence of their differend. This differend cannot demand, even subjectively, to be communicated to all thought. The social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games. The social bond is linguistic, but it is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying
different rules. Scientific knowledge requires that one language game, denotative, be retained and all others excluded. Scientific knowledge is in this way set apart from the language games that combine to form the social bond.

Narratives are language games. Lyotard finds a subtle relationship between emancipator and scientific narratives. Wittgenstein for the first time argued that both these narratives are characterized by ‘language games’. Lyotard’s says that social relationships are like games that require language in order to participate. Language games are the social bond.

Narratives are forms of knowledge. Lyotard generally talks about emancipatory or cultural narratives and scientific narratives. These narratives are forms of knowledge. The cultural narratives include denotative statement. Denotative statements show know-how, knowing how to live, how to listen, how to eat. Normally, the cultural narratives give some pragmatic or down to earth rules to the people. The society is thus bound together by these cultural narratives. These narratives carry knowledge as they have legitimacy of the society.

The idea of story is central to Lyotard’s account. Enlightenment thinking has preserved itself by perpetuating what he calls ‘metanarratives’, which structures the discourses of modern religion, politics, philosophy and science. Metanarratives are a form of ideology which constrains and controls the individual subject. They are violent and tyrannous in the way that they falsely impose a sense of ‘totality’ and ‘universality’ on a set of disparate things, actions and events. Just like narratives in literature, metanarratives, in other words, provide a form into which a series of discrete elements can be ordered. Their function is to legitimate political positions and courses of action; legitimation is always a matter of maintaining power, and is inseparable from violence.
It works in science, for example, when scientists make a discovery and legitimate it by telling a kind of ‘epic’ narrative about it. Science can thus preserve its transcendent quality because the state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the state’s own credibility is based on that epic.

But the crucial point about Lyotard’s analysis of this reliance on metanarratives is that postmodernity has thrown it into crisis. It is not just Lyotard himself who is suspicious of metanarratives, but there exists a general disbelief in metanarratives. In crucial areas of contemporary life politics, for example metanarratives have begun to disappear and been replaced by what the philosopher Wittgenstein referred to as ‘language games,’ where truth is a matter of rhetoric and performativity. (Wittgenstein 16) The question is therefore, ‘Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?’ (Ibid. xxv). Lyotard goes on to make clear that “what legitimates knowledge in the postmodern condition is how well it performs, or enables a person to perform, in particular roles’. At the end of the book Lyotard stresses the manipulation of industry upon research, causes it to be legitimated by ‘performativity’.

Science, in contrast, accepts only denotative statements. In other words, it is only ‘birth value’ that determines the acceptability to scientific statements. Unlike narratives, science is not a direct and shared component of the social bond. Although there are these and other difference between (cultural) narratives and science, the fact is that they are both language games and one is no more or less necessary than the other.

Cultural grand narratives are fables, myths and legends. Lyotard is much critical of grand or metanarratives. The fact is that the present society has increasingly become plural in its culture and ethnicity. Lyotard writes about it that with the decline of the grand narratives,
legitimacy becomes plural, local, and immanent. There will necessarily be many discourses of Legitimation. It moves down to the level of practice.

Functionalism and conflict as forms of metanarratives and their advocates Simmel, Marx, Dahrendord, Durkheim, Weber, and Parsons have come down as pack of cards. The narratives constructed by them as general theories of society have lost all their relevance (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1984, 53). Describing the irrelevance of metanarratives, Lyotards writes: Narratives are fables, myths, legends; fit only for women and children. (Ibid. 27)

In other words, science questions the legitimacy of narratives and helps to legitimate ‘legitimation’ as a problem. Science wants everyone to believe that it offers legitimate, ‘true’ knowledge and it critiques narratives for being illegitimate and untrue (Nicole, Bran 84). Scientific narrartives: do not tell the truth. Lyotard begins his book, The Postmodern Condition (1979) with these opening lines: The object of this study is to describe the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies. I have decided to use the word ‘postmodern’ to describe that condition. Lyotard argues that science has always been in conflict with narratives. The majority of them prove to be false (Lyotard, 3). In his work, Lyotard has defined the forms of knowledge. He defines knowledge and comes to the conclusion that scientific knowledge never gives out truth (Ibid. 72).

Status of knowledge is always altered. Knowledge is never universal. The traditional society becomes modern and the modern society takes a turn to postmodern society. The pace of knowledge is faster or slower depending on the country and within countries. Science, therefore, does not give the absolute truth. Scientific knowledge is never neutral. Lyotard argues that scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse. It
is a framework of thinking. Our knowledge about madness, sexuality and punishment has changed all through the periods of history. It clearly shows that knowledge in all its respects is a discourse. The leading sciences and technologies have had to do with language: phonology and theories of linguistics, problems of communication and cybernetics, modern theories of algebra and informatics, computers and their language, problems of translation and the search for areas of compatibility among computer languages, problems of information storage, telematics and the perfection of intelligent terminals, paradoxology (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1984, 3-4). Technological transformation of knowledge is seen in the postmodern era. Scientific knowledge in our present information age is subject to technological transformation. Cybernetics is the best way for the transmission of our acquired knowledge. Knowledge is also commercialized through machines and later, in the circulation of sounds and visual images (media). Knowledge thus would become common to a layman through technological devices.

Nature of knowledge changes in the technological transformation. In the age of technological development, the nature of knowledge cannot remain unchanged. We can predict that anything in the structure of knowledge which cannot be transformed through machines is abandoned and consequently the direction of research will change.

The producers and users of knowledge must now possess the means translating into these languages whatever they want to invent or learn. Along with hegemony of computers comes certain logics, and therefore, a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as ‘knowledge statements’ (Ibid. 4). The moment the knowledge comes out of a computer, it is taken as legitimate knowledge. The national social science research body-makes all efforts to sanction
technological aid to research. The present scientific knowledge is never neutral. It does not give any knowledge; it only provides skills and technology. Hence Lyotard says that the transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions (Ibid. 48).

There is thus, a constant change in the nature of our knowledge. Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major-perhaps the major-stake in the worldwide competition for power. It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control over access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor.

Knowledge becomes a commodity. In the present era, knowledge is produced in order to be sold. Such knowledge is for new production. Obviously, the production of knowledge is for exchange (Ibid. 5). Lyotard comments on the present nature of knowledge. The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume- that is the form of value. Knowledge is now and will be produced in order to be sold; it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself; it loses its ‘use-value’ (Ibid. 4-5).

It is widely accepted that Knowledge has become the principal force of production over the last few decades. In the post-industrial and postmodern age, science maintains and strengthens the productive
capacities of nation-states. The differences between the developed and developing countries are that of the production of knowledge (Ibid. 5). What is important in the content of knowledge is the information richness. The nation-states, which are endowed with more information, are considered more powerful. It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour (Ibid. 5).

Scientific knowledge is subordinate to government. The body of knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge (Ibid. 7). The society is plural and diverse. The form of knowledge varies according to the plurality of society. Knowledge and power are strongly correlated and those who are in power decide what knowledge is. In this computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government. In developing countries, it is invariably the government which sponsors a large number of projects and it is through the projects that the scientists are subordinated to government, from big science to little sciences. When Lyotard talks about narratives, he includes both the narratives-scientific and social-cultural. His basic argument is that the assumptions, which we had about science, have all been demolished in the context of present-day society; therefore, the scientific narratives do not have any legitimacy. It’s a widely accepted assumption of science. During the period of earlier modernity, around the 18th century onwards, people had great faith in science. For instance, instead of answering to religion as the guarantee of truth, political and economic fields developed which claimed to have the standing of science. Being ‘scientific’ or ‘rational’ was a sign of credibility. Possessing scientific knowledge implied behind mystification and superstitions; we can reveal the facts about the world and lead all of humanity to a brighter day.
The scientific assumptions, which worked during the early periods of modernity, still function with the same vigour. Lytoard claims that around the end of the Second World War, most of the scientific myths have collapsed. What have remained today are not the big scientific narratives but the little sciences. Scientific assumptions collapsed and hence rejected narratives.

In a long period between Enlightenment to mid-20th centuries sciences justified itself by claiming that it needs no justification. The idea of its activities was pursued in the name of the timeless metanarratives of progress, emancipation and knowledge. By appealing in this way to ideas whose meanings are taken to be self-evident and universally agreed, science was able to masquerade as a single project objectively carried out for the good of human race. But, in the aftermath of the Second World War, it was realized by the world community that the scientific assumptions, which ruled over the human mind, had collapsed.

Scientific rationality does not lead to progress. Science contributed to the massive ecological disaster and the development of nuclear and chemical weapons. It has made difficult to link scientific rationality to progress. Science has failed to comprehend concrete reality. It is a myth to understand that science is exact in all its aspects. There are several areas where science stands on uncertain grounds. For instance, approaches like chaos theory, quantum mechanics, etc., have highlighted uncertainty in measurement. Because of these influences, it has become harder to see science as the activity of a rational mind confronting a concrete reality.

Science is a Commercial Enterprise. The objective of science has to find out the truth, to unmask the reality. This has not happened. Science gives skills; through the skill commodity production is done. There is a big growth of computerized means of information processing. So science has become a big commercial enterprise. Truth is not the
criteria of the theory and discovery instead performance and efficiency are the criteria of theory.

Legitimation is based on performativity. The system must follow the regular path which is the positivist philosophy of “efficiency”. The aim is to demonstrate on the basis of a few exhibits that the pragmatics of postmodern scientific knowledge has little affinity with quest for performativity (Ibid. 54). Science is divided into several specializations: Knowledge is classified into two divisions; Social science knowledge and natural science knowledge. The natural science philosophy has divided into physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, geology and so on. Here complete knowledge has proved to be false. Science is now divided into innumerable specialism. There is no common forum which could bind all these specialism together. According to Lyotard “sciences today are sceptical about the possibility of penetrating the truth or finding of answer. So sciences are carried out on a more modest, limited level. Realizing that they cannot find permanent answers to everything, they only come up with temporarily valid opinions, and seek to solve merely immediate, local problems.

In the postmodern era, there is an emergence of little sciences because knowledge became splintered and incoherent. The idea that one day the sum of all knowledge will add to a state of perfect information has now been abandoned. Instead of it, we have today a large number of little sciences consisting of minor specialism. Splintering of scientific knowledge also influenced the disintegration of social and cultural life.

Lyotard has his focus fixed on scientific knowledge but he draws a parallel between the scientific narratives and social cultural narratives. As the coherent scientific knowledge got splintered in specialism, so there also appeared a splintering in cultural and social life. In his report, Lyotard found many echoes in fields as diverse as a political theory,
cultural theory, and art criticism. Indeed, later edition of the book *The Postmodern Condition* include a postscript, which concentrates on aesthetic rather than scientific issues, and the text as whole can be read as an overview of how the rules of games’ have changed in culture at large. It is perhaps not surprising to learn therefore that postmodern condition has had more of an impact on the humanities than it has had on the hard sciences.

Lyotard has his major concern on the forms of knowledge, its ability for production. But his findings have a profound impact on humanities, politics, and social thoughts. The points in his reports are as follows the Re-explanation of Marxism is seen in the work. Lyotard was much influenced by Marxism. For Marx, class was the major instrument of exploitation. The proletariat class was universal and this class would lead the revolution for socialism. Such a position of Marx was not acceptable to Lyotard and other postmodernists. He argued that any single class, structure or factor cannot bring revolution. His plea has been that modern political theory is never coherent in its structure. There are much of fluid identities and social groups in the arena of political. And, this will never lead to any revolution. In other words knowledge is splintered and therefore the working or proletariat class is also charged by this incoherent knowledge. Such a fluid, diverse and incoherent knowledge falsifies or transforms the Marxian theory. This is the precise impact of Lyotard on Marxian theory of socialism.

In contrast he advocates a paralogical legitimation, which is in essence, a conscious move away from established reason and methods. He construct a postmodern epistemology, which can put up knowledge under the new conditions of being “against metanarratives and foundationalism; …and being for heterogeneity, plurality, constant
innovation, and pragmatic construction of local rules and prescriptive
greements agreed upon by participants” (Best and Kellner 2002, web page).

Lyotard was influenced by the writings of Karl Marx. He shared Marx’s dissatisfaction with capitalism, and became involved in the socialist revolution movement in Algeria. However, he reconciled from his involvement there in 1966, due to his loss of faith in Marxism as a totalising theory. Marxism positivises Lyotard’s growing incredulity toward metanarratives, already stimulated by the World War II experiences. After this he returned to the study and writing of philosophy. The writings of Lyotard were strongly influenced by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s own incredulity towards an understanding of truth as universal has exercised influence on Lyotard. A contemporary of Lyotard was Jacques Derrida. He is responsible for the development of the concept of deconstructionism. Following Nietzsche, he also talks of the metaphorcity of language. The signifier is not always associated to the signified. There is no one to one message so that meaning is not immediately clear to us. As a rational collaborator of Lyotard, it is clear to see that Derrida does not have alternative to metanarrative legitimation. ‘Lyotard sees reason is not a universal and unchangeable human faculty or principle but a specific and variable human production’ (IEP, Lyotard J-F Web Page).

It is believed that Reason is a product of human intelligence and not as something that inevitably leads to an apprehension of the truth. Speaking in general everyday terms, it is preferable to view ultimate legitimation of all actions, scientific or otherwise, as understood through a variety of faculties, including reason. In fact, Lyotard effectively contradicts himself in his discussion of postmodernism by virtue of that concepts function as a new, all-embracing metanarrative. The metanarrative is seen as the only way of understanding the world and interpreting events, facts
or experiences, to the exclusion of all others. By reading the story of this we came to know that Lyotard has merely offered a new true story of knowledge. What is contradictory in Lyotard’s idea is that he gives unnecessary emphasis to the fact that the nature and circulation of knowledge are changing in the postmodern era. His line of thought is that knowledge is codified as information and translated into computer languages. It is commodified and therefore ideas in research are produced not for their truth-value but for their saleability. The ‘commodified knowledge can co-exist with knowledge for its own sake’ (Mike, 2004, Web Blog). It seems a contracted interpretation of his own forecast to limit the existence of knowledge to a commodified form. This awareness may well have serious implications for the interior logic of Lyotards’ whole argument.

The usefulness of Lyotard’s work is already well established. According to Best and Kellner “in many circles Lyotard is celebrated as the postmodern theorist par excellence and above all, Lyotard has emerged as the champion of difference and plurality in all theoretical realms and discourses” (Best and Kellner, 2002, Web Site). It is believed that Lyotard’s theories have been and will continue to sustain all who find themselves in the marginal’s opinion or thought. This includes women, in their fight for equality with men, in all realms of life.

Lyotard has played a significant role in the ‘pluralisation’ of Western society. It would have been unfeasible for so many different types of people, with different faith expressions, political persuasions, sexual orientations, etc, to share liberty in this ‘multiplicity’ of society, without an acceptance of plurality, while many have offered some severe speculative criticisms of this book. They have also agreed its complete success in securing a firm grip for dissimilarity and difference within ‘the most highly developed societies. It has confidently been made clear that
Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* develops the claim that today’s capitalism acts as a ‘Vanguard machine’ that drags humanity after it, dehumanising it in the drive for ultimate efficiency (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1984, 63). He argues that the only resistance to this form of the inhuman is another inhuman that is at work in human subjectivity. In contrast to this technological inhuman, Lyotard claims that postmodern thought is able to identify an alternative form of the inhuman: the potential for being taken hold off by surprising and uncanny transformative possibilities that cannot be predicted, explained or mastered by technologically based systems of reason. He locates this sense of the inhuman in the ‘anguish of a mind haunted by a familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think’ (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1991, 2).

For Lyotard the human is the product of a conflict between two inhuman: the inhuman systems of technology and capitalism that threaten to satisfy anything in the human that is not of value to them, and, within this same human, the uncanny strangeness of another inhuman that is a potential site of resistance. He argues by raising question what else remains as ‘Politics’ except resistance to this inhuman [system]? And what else is left resist with but the debt to which each soul has contracted with the miserable and admirable indetermination form which it was born and does not cease to be born? – Which is to say, with the other inhuman...? It is the task of writing, thinking, literature, arts, to venture to bear witness to it (Ibid.7). Without the inhuman indetermination at its
heart, the human ceases to be able to resist the first form of the inhuman, that of the developmental system.

As Lyotard argues in a later essay Answering to the Postmodernism? ‘The right to this no-man’s-land is the very foundation of human rights... Humanity is only human of people have this “no-man’s land” (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1997, 116). As the closing sentence in the long quotation above states, the task of postmodern writing, thinking, literature and art is to bear witness to this ‘no-man’s-land and militate against the drive to exclude it from the systems that seek to explain entirely and control it. The means by which it can do this are generated by his analysis of the sublime that was introduced in Chapter 1, which presents ‘the existence of something unpresentable’ (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1992, 11), in every realism: in this case, a ‘no-man’s-land’ at the heart of humanism. It is thus by rejecting the stable identity of the modern humanist subject that Lyotard’s second sense of the inhuman stages a defence of humanity.

Lyotard further states that the technologisation of contemporary culture threatens to dehumanise us and diminish us to the workings in the machine of capitalism, for Haraway this technology is something to be embraced because of the paths it opens up to transform the sexual hierarchies and stereotypes of modern culture. Each manufactures challenge critique of the humanist individual, and develops an account of the postmodern subject that is radically fractured. It is important to recognise, though, that none of the cases discussed in this section simply dismiss subjectivity in its entirety. Both the idea of a fixed and immutable modern subject and the idea of a subject-free postmodernism are overly reductive. It is more accurate to acknowledge that the relationship between the modern and the postmodern is based on a continual renegotiation and disruption of subjective identity, a process that Lyotard
recognises ‘it has been at work, for a long time now, in modernity itself (Lyotard, Jean-Francois 1991, 34). The artist and the writer are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that work and text have the character of an event; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization always begins too soon. Post modern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo).

The gradual interruption of the idea of a self-conscious, self-sufficient subject that has also planned displays an increasing intellect that identity is produced by the social, the cultural and technological context from which it emerges. Therefore it becomes a historically alterable structure that remains open to redefinition and transformation in the future. In order to explore what is at risk in this process of alteration, it is helpful to turn to the question of history.

Deconstruction is only the negation of the negation, it remains in the same sphere, and it nourishes the same terrorist pretension to truth, that is to say the association of the sign here in its decline, that’s the only difference with intensity. It requires the same surgical tampering with words, the same split and the same exclusions that the lover’s demand exacts on skins.

To conclude Jean-Francois Lyotard in his essay ‘an answer to the question, What is the Postmodern? continues to employ the terms realism, modernism and postmodernism, rejects the sense of historical periodisation. All three coexist simultaneously in any culture and indicate different modes of presentation within a given milieu. Realism, he argues, is the mainstream style of a culture, and its task is a recognisable meaning’ in order that its audience can ‘decode images and sequences
rapidly’ and thereby ‘protect [their] consciousness from doubt’ ((Lyotard, Jean 1992, 5-6).

In contrast to realism, Lyotard sets modernism and postmodernism, both of which he sees as potentially disruptive forms, whose task is, he says, ‘presenting the existence of something unpresentable. There is something we can conceive of that we can neither see nor show’ (Ibid.11). Lyotard, invoking the categories of philosophical aesthetics, calls the effect of this sort of art sublime.

Lyotard distinguishes the modern from the postmodern sublime by arguing that in the former the unpresentable is ‘invoked only as absent content, while the form, thanks to its recognisable consistency, and continues to offer the reader material for consolation or pleasure’ (Ibid. 14), while the latter ‘invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself’ (Ibid. 15). Lyotard’s has given an example of the French novelist Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time and Remembrance of Things Past*. The novel depicts a narrator/protagonist whose psychological transformations over time are impossible to present within the conventional narrative form it employs, and yet are alluded to as the ‘absent content’ of the text.

In contrast to this modernist sublime, postmodernism confronts the reader or viewer with a work that is challenging in terms of form, structure, and content. Lyotard mentions the Irish writer James Joyce here, arguing that his last works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, which employ puns, obscure allusions, quotations and a whole range of means to disrupt readers’ perceptions about what a novel should be, generate ‘new presentations not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable’ (Ibid. 5).

The modern and the postmodern are presented as dynamic forms the work to disrupt the expectations of a culture, and change. The culture is transformed and readers and spectators become used to, and no longer
shocked by, their contents and methods. For Lyotard, the role of postmodernism is thus to perform an imminent critique of the day-to-day structures of realism. What this means is that it operates within the realist context of a given culture to shatter its norms and challenges, its assumptions, not with a new set of criteria drawn from outside of that culture, but rather by showing the contradictions the culture contains, what it represses, refuses to recognise or makes unpresentable. In other words, according to Lyotard the postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes or the work he creates is not in principle governed by preestablished rules and cannot be judged by the application of given categories to this text or work. Such rules and categories are what the work or text is investigating.

Postmodernism breaks the rules of both form and content. Postmodernists call for a transformation of critical assumptions as a culture attempts to respond to the immanent critique of those categories and laws. Lyotard argues, a work of art ‘can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Thus understood, postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent’ (Ibid.13).

Even Lyotard’s formalist analysis of the relations between realism, modernism and postmodernism necessarily makes reference to a notion of historical context of the idea. The postmodern cultures have particular realist ways of depicting the world that are open to challenge and transformation. We may thus expect a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the knower.

To conclude the present chapter, researcher came to know the following key ideas of Lyotard’s postmodern condition. Metanarratives both scientific and cultural- are totalizing and have lost their legitimacy. They need to be rejected. Marxism and Functionalism are examples of these narratives. Lyotard argues that it is impossible for Metanarratives to
identify any fundamental truth about human society. Science does not help us to find out the truth. Science is a big myth limited by the institutions in which it is created. It has a special language, which only makes a sense within its own boundary.

Science is not progressive nor is it a complete knowledge. Science is not unified, nor is knowledge coherent. It is not universal and timeless. Knowledge is splintered and so is the cultural life disintegrated. The state of knowledge which Lyotard finds for hard sciences also applies to humanities.

Therefore the postmodern era is the era of micropolitics. Power lies at the grassroots level. It is found in small scale agitations. It’s true in the present situation also. Those who want to become a leader or a politician they must be familiar with the ground reality. It’s their first and the last determination for playing the macropolitics to micropolitics.