
**POSTCOLONIALISM:
A Critical Literary Theory
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ABSTRACT

This paper designates that Post colonialism or postcolonial aesthetic is a broad, postmodern intellectual discourse that has renewed the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, political theories and literary criticism. Emerging from the colonial testimony of Third-world countries and the discourses of minorities, it aims at shedding ‘the colonial amnesia’ and creating *tabularasae*(blank sheets / slates) with a view to rewriting /rethinking of all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact and addressing the questions of history, culture, identity, ethnicity, gender, language and education It entered the agenda of metropolitan intellectuals and academics as a reflex of a new consciousness around 1960 in the wake of political independence sought by various Third-World countries in Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana and Nigeria), Asian Continent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana).. These now independent states / countries shared a common history of colonial domination, the imposition of the English language and British ways and styles, loss of indigenous cultures, psychological dependency and slavish survivalism. Hence, the rejection of the Western hegemony forms the nucleus of the postcolonial rhetoric which in turn creates space for marginalized groups or the disadvantaged nations. It exploits the Derridean deconstructive strategies and subversive modes like hybridity, orature, mimicry, ambivalence etc for destabilization of Eurocentric norms and ways of thinking and thus punctures the widespread tendency in contemporary discourse of giving, in the words of Homi k. Bhaba, “a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities and peoples” (Bhaba,1994:71). In other words, it provides a means of reclamation of cultural past and resistance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices can be challenged.

INTRODUCTION

POSTCOLONIALISM

The concept of Post-colonialism (or often post colonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. The term as originally used by historians after the second World War such as ‘post-colonial state’, where ‘post-colonial’ had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-

independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization. Although the study of the controlling power of representation in the colonized societies had begun in the late 1970s with the text such as Said's *Orientalism*, and led to the development of what came to be called 'Colonialist Discourse Theory' in the work of critics such as Spivak and Bhabha, the actual term 'post-colonial' was not employed in these early studies of the power of colonialist discourse to shape the form and opinion and policies in the colony and metropolis.

"Post colonialism", in the words of Charles E. Bressler , "is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries" (265). It usually excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints, and concentrates on Writings from colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other places and societies that were once dominated by European cultural, political and philosophical tradition.

Although there is little consensus regarding the proper content, scope and relevance of postcolonial studies, as a critical ideology it has acquired various interpretations. Like deconstruction and other various postmodern approaches to textual analysis, post colonialism is a heterogeneous field of study where even its spelling provides several alternatives. The critics are not in agreement whether the term should be used with or without hyphen : i. e. 'Post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' have different meanings. The hyphenated term 'Post-colonialism' marks a historical period as is suggested by phrases like 'after colonialism', 'after independence', 'after the end of empire' whereas the term 'post colonialism' referring to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of the colonization to the present.

As a historical period, post-colonialism stands for the post - second World War decolonizing phase. Although the colonial country achieved political freedom, the colonial values do not disappear with the independence of a country.

It seems that Postcolonial theory emerged from the colonized peoples' frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes and dreams about their future and their own identities. How the colonized respond to changes in the language, curricular matters in education, race differences, and a host of other discourses, including the act of writing become the context and the theories of post colonialism. The project of post colonialism is not only applicable to the students of literature alone, indeed, it seeks to emancipate the oppressed, the deprived and the down-trodden all over the world.

Thus, the term 'Post-colonialism' marks the end of colonialism by giving the indigenous people the necessary authority and political and cultural freedom to take their place and gain independence by overcoming political and cultural imperialism.

COLONIALISM

The term ‘colonialism’ is important in defining the specific form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years. Elleke Boehmer defines ‘colonialism’ in her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* as “a settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands”.

Colonialism has been a recurrent feature of human history. The history of colonialism has existed since ancient times. By 1900 almost every country or region in the world had been subjugated by European colonialism at one time or another. The Period after the Second World War saw an upsurge of new independent states. India and Pakistan were granted independence in 1947. France’s decolonization was marked by wars in French, Indochina, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Belgium, Portugal, and the Netherlands all divested themselves of their overseas possessions during the 1950’s, 60’s and 70s. ‘Colonialism’ has taken many different form and has engendered diverse effects around the world that can be gauged by thinking about its relationship with the two other terms: ‘Capitalism’ and ‘imperialism’.

CAPITALISM

Colonialism was the means through which capitalism achieved its global expansion. AniaLoomba marks, “Colonialism was the midwife that assisted the birth of European capitalism, or that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism could not have taken place in Europe”. Colonialism was the lucrative commercial operation bringing wealth and riches to western nations through the exploitation of others. It was the first and foremost part of commercial venture of the Western nations. Dennis Judd argues, “no one can doubt that the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure”. Thus, colonialism was pursued for economic profit, reward and riches. As colonialism and capitalism share mutually supportive relationship with each other , colonialism can be defined as ‘the conquest and control on other peoples land and goods’.

IMPERIALISM

‘Colonialism’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘imperialism’ but in truth the terms mean different things. In its most general sense, imperialism refers to the formation of an empire, and, as such, has been an aspect of all periods of history in which one nation has extended its domination over

several neighboring nations. Edward Said uses imperialism in this general sense to mean “the practice, and the attitudes of a domination metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory” (1993, 8). ‘Colonialism’, however, is only one form of the ideology of imperialism, and specifically concerns the settlement of one group of people in a new location.

Imperialism is not strictly concerned with the issue of settlement. Childs and Williams define ‘imperialism’ as “the extension and expansion of trade and commerce under the protection of political, legal and military control” (227). Colonialism is a particular historical manifestation of imperialism, specific to certain places and time.

COLONIALISM: FORMS AND EFFECTS

Ashish Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) states two forms of colonization : one is the physical conquest of territories. The other is the colonization of the minds, selves and cultures. The first mode is violent, transparent in its self interest and greed. The second mode is that of the rationalists, modernists and the liberals who claim to have the responsibility of civilizing the uncivilized world. Nandy comments on the colonization of minds as,

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds(xi).

Marxist thinkers also distinguished the two forms of colonialism as ‘precapitalist’ and ‘capitalist colonialism’. Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered. It restructured the economies of the latter so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries. This flow worked in both directions. Slaves and indentured laborers as well as raw material were transported to the metropolis. The colonies provided captive market for European goods. This results into the flow of profit and goods along with a global shift of population. Both the colonizers and the colonized moved – colonial masters as administrators, soldiers, merchants, settlers, travelers, writers, domestic staff, missionaries, teachers and scientists and the colonized as slaves, indentured labors, domestic servants, travelers and traders. Thus, colonialism produced economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry. The term ‘colonialism’ results in the consolidation of imperial power to govern the indigenous people in act ‘colonialism’.

COLONIAL / POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE

Theories of colonial discourses have been hugely influential in the development of Post colonialism. Postcolonial discourse was the result of the work of several writers such as Aime Cesaire, Frantz

Fanon, Ngugiwa Thiango, Edward Said, Ashcroft et. all , Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aizaz Ahmad. In general their work explores the ways of representations, and modes of perception that are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep colonized people subservient to colonial rule.

Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon is an important figure in the field of postcoloniality and central to any discussion in anti-colonial resistance. He was influenced by contemporary philosophers and poets such as Jean–Paul Sartre and Aime Cesaire. Fanon wrote two books – *Black Skin and White Masks* (1961) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) that deal angrily with mechanics of colonialism and its effect on those it ensnared.

Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* examined the main psychological effect of colonialism and *The Wretched of the Earth* is a broader study of how anti - colonial sentiment might address the task of decolonization. Fanon’s writing cover a range of areas and have been influential in a number of fields, such as psychiatry, philosophy, politics and cultural studies.

Edward Said

If the origin of postcolonial aesthetics lies in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), its theory is found in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Postcolonial theory is an area that has developed largely as a result of Said’s work. Along with Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak form what Robert Young has called the ‘Holy Trinity’ of postcolonial theorists.

Said defines ‘Orientalism’ as “Western style for dominating, restructuring having authority over orient” (3). The term ‘Orientalism’ which refers to the historical and ideological process whereby false images of and the myths about the Eastern or the “orient” world have been constructed in various Western discourses, including that of imaginative literature. Orientalism which is based on the cultural superiority of the West over the East paved the way for imperialism.

Edward Said looked about the divisive relationship of the colonizer and the colonized. AniaLoomba rightly says, “Said argues that the representation of the orient in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its ‘others’(44). Said’s project is to show how knowledge about the non- Europeans was a part of the process of dominating them. Western attitude towards Orientalists is based on ignorance of the Eastern culture and literature.

The colonizers imposed their culture, and literature on the colonized people through various means. Said tries to show that West was wrong to treat the East as inferior both culturally and intellectually. Said argues that Western views of the Orient are not based on what is observed to exist in Oriental lands but often results from the West’s dream, fantasies and assumptions about what this radically different place contains.

The West has misrepresented ‘the Orient’ as mystic place of exoticism, moral laxity, sexual degeneracy and so forth. Orientalism constructs binary division. The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms. Leela Gandhi states “Orientalism is the first book in which Said relentlessly unmasks the ideological disguises of imperialism”(67). Said’s “Orientalism can be said to inaugurate a new kind of study of colonialism” (Loomba 44). He wants to do away the binary opposition between the West and the East so that one can not claim the superiority over the other. Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) continues and extends the work began in *Orientalism* by documenting the imperial complicities of some major works of the Western literary canon.

HomiBhabha

Bhabha has popularised the term ‘ambivalence’, ‘mimicry’ and ‘hybridity’. The term ‘ambivalence’ first was developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. Adapted into colonial discourse theory by HomiBhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

‘Mimicry’ is an important term in the post-colonial theory, because it has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizers’ cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of these traits. Rather, it results in a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening.

Bhabha describes “Mimicry as one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (35). British wanted to create a class of Indians who should adopt English opinion, morals. These figures were just like Fanon’s French educated colonials depicted in *Black Skin, White Masks*. They are ‘mimic men’ They learn to act English but do not look English nor are they accepted as such. As Bhabha puts it, “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English” (87). Mimic men are not slavish. They also have power to menace the colonizers. The use of English language on the part of the colonized is a threat to orientalist structure of knowledge in which oppositional distinction is made. The mimic men in relation to the colonizers, “almost the same but not quite” (89) is what Bhabha thinks as a source of anti-colonial resistance. ‘Mimicry’ gives rise to postcolonial analysis by subverting the colonial master’s authority and hegemony. It is a weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. Leela Gandhi rightly says, “mimicry inaugurates the process of anti - colonial self -differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation’ (150).

The term ‘hybridity’ has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer / colonized relations stresses the inter-dependence and mutual construction of

their subjectivities. ‘Hybridization’ is a kind of negotiation, both political and cultural, between the colonizer and the colonized. Like Bhabha, Edward Said also underlined the importance of ‘cultural hybridity’ and it has come to stay and no amount of effort can completely separate the West from the East. ‘Hybridity’ being an integral part of postcolonial discourse bridges the gap between West and the East.

Gayatri Spivak

Spivak’s most significant contribution to feminism and subaltern studies is her post-colonial exposition of the status of the Indian woman. She asks whether the Indian subaltern woman has a voice, or even a voice consciousness? Can the subaltern speak? Will she be heard? And Spivak comes to conclusion that ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ (Gandhi 3). Spivak has praised Said’s ‘Orientalism’ because she is interested in the current concept of “marginality”. Said’s work has foregrounded marginality and created the ground for the marginal.

In discussing the silence of subaltern as female, Spivak explains that she was not using the term literally to suggest that such women never already talked. It is not so much that subaltern women did not speak, but rather that others did not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener. The subaltern cannot speak because their words cannot be properly interpreted. It is, therefore, the silence of the female as subaltern is a result of a failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation.

THE PROJECT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

The Project of English studies becomes a medium to strengthen the colonial rule. English literature was used as a medium for the colonial civilizing mission. English “literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation” (Ashcroft etc. all 3). Macaulay’s minutes of 1835 is usually cited as an evidence that defended the introduction of English Education in colonial India: “a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature of India or Arabia. Macaulay’s valorisation of English literature at the cost of indigenous literature is taken as a paradigmatic instance of canon formation” (Gandhi 144).

Colonialism is defended as a project of civilizing the underdeveloped world. Gauri Viswanathan in her *Masks of Conquest* unmask the British educational mission, as they tried to ‘mask’ or disguise their real interest by representing colonial rule as an educational mission and popularize the human aspect of English culture. In contrast to the violence of European colonization the English literacy text becomes the mask for economic exploitationsuccessfully camouflaging the material activities of the colonizer (20).

ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE

Anti-colonial resistance is another major issue in postcolonialism. The colonial experience is a continuing process even after the formal end of the colonial situation. Anti - colonial struggles, therefore, must challenge colonialism at political, intellectual and emotional levels. The two historical figures, Gandhi and Fanon, represent a style of total resistance to the political and cultural offensive of the colonial civilizing mission. Both of them suggest Nandy's idea of psychological resistance to colonialism. Fanon asserts, "Total liberation is that which concerns all sectors of personality" (250). In Fanon's view the colonized has the ability to resist the cultural supremacy of Europe. Gandhi feels sad about Indians attraction towards the glamorous superficiality of the West. He remarks, "We brought the English and we keep them. Why do we forget that our adoption of their civilization makes their presence in India at all possible ? Your hatred against theirs ought to be transferred to their civilization" (Gandhi, Mahatma 66). Gandhi was a kind of liberators to literary men, the one who broke the shackles of all around. He freed the enslaved Indian writers.

Anti-colonial resistances have taken many forms. Anti-colonial movements drew upon western ideas and vocabularies to challenge the colonial rule. They often hybridized what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with indigenous ideas. English education fostered the ideas of liberty and freedom in native population. There is shift from 'abrogation' to 'appropriation', from unlearning English to the project of learning how to curse in the master's tongue, the emergence of Caliban- paradigm. The colonized may now assert like Caliban who tells Prospero : "You taught me language; and my profit on it is , I know how to curse" (*Tempest* Act I sc. II). Caliban symbolically illustrates the logic of 'protesting' out of rather than against the cultural vocabulary of colonialism.

FROM 'COMMONWEALTH' TO 'POSTCOLONIAL'

The shift from 'Colonial' to 'Commonwealth' perhaps suggests particular version of history in which the status of colonized countries happily changes from subservience to equality. Commonwealth literature may well have been created in an attempt to bring together writings from around the world on an equal footing, yet the 'Commonwealth' in 'Commonwealth literature' was never fully free from the older, more imperious connotations of the term. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that, the term Commonwealth literature has finally fallen into academic disfavour, one can see that its biggest problem indeed was the presupposition that an umbilical cord tied all there diverse bodies of writings --- from Australia, Canada, India, Nigeria, Kenya, Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados and the rest ---to the mother country England, which absent centre set the evaluative norms. Absent – because literature from Britain was never seen as a part of this package (6).

However, the patient, detailed and enthusiastic readings of Commonwealth literature laid the foundations for the various postcolonial criticism that were to follow, and to which much postcolonial critical activity remains indebted.

Recently, a new term ‘post-colonial’ foregrounding the political dimension of both text and context of this literature - is being used more often, slowly pushing out, the old seemingly apolitical name ‘Commonwealth literature’. “‘Post-colonial literature’, Mukherjee says, “is presumably free from such centralist undertones; it suggests de-centring, plurality, hybridity, a dismantling authority – hence many ways it is an enabling and protean term” (6-7).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the term postcolonial has been used to replace the earlier term like ‘The Third World Literature’ the term coined by Alfred Sauvy or ‘Commonwealth Literature’. The term Commonwealth Literature fell into the rough weather in the hands of writers from erstwhile British colonies, when it was drawn upon them that the writers of the colonizer (i.e. England) do not form a part of this body of literature. Hence, a new term, post-colonial literature is coined to suggest decentring of colonial literature. Two books, *Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin and *The Encyclopedia of Post –Colonial Literature in English* (1994) ed. by Benson and Connolly have popularised the term ‘post-colonial’ and lent respectability to post-colonial literature.

POST COLONIAL THEORY

Although a number of postcolonial theorist and critics such as Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, and GayatriChakravortySpivak contributed to postcolonialism’s ever-growing body of theory and its practical methodology, an inherent tension exists at the centre of postcolonial theory, for those who practice this theory and provide and develop its discourse are themselves a heterogenous group of critics. On one hand critics such as Fredrick Jameson and Georg Gubelberger come from a European cultural, literary and scholarly background. Another group that includes GayatriSpivak, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and many other were raised in the Third World cultures but now reside, study and write in the West. And still another group that includes writer such as Aijaz Ahmad live and work in the Third World. A theoretical and practical gap occurs between the theory and practice of those who trained and living in the West and the Third World, subaltern writers living and writing in non - Western cultures. Out of such tensions, postcolonial theorists have to discover problematic topics for exploration and debate.

No theory, either political or literary, can be totally objective. Postcolonialism can neither be rejected nor accepted fully. MakarandParajape states, the best way to begin interrogating postcolonism is not by pretending that we are the masters of our own academic destinies but by admitting, how colonized we still are. What is more, we cannot continue to blame only the West for our sorry state of subjection; we must blame ourselves. The dignity of the brown-skinned scholarship depends more than even before on how we view ourselves, rather than how others view us (43).

Post colonial situation has given our writers confidence to write creative literature in English and it would be good for them to gain confidence to write literary criticism in our way- then only ‘post-

colonial' redeem the colonial. Paranjape further adds that, "We need to strengthen ourselves, our institutions, journals and publication industries. We need not merely attempt to duplicate or copy metropolitan system, but develop our needs" (46).

Postcolonial studies are preoccupied with the issues of hybridity, creolisation, in-betweenness, diasporas and liminality with the mobility. Arun P. Mukherjee is of the view that -Indian literatures, I believe, are too multifarious and too heterogeneous to be containable in the net of a single theory. Anyway, the questions Indian readers must ask Indian literary texts particularly in the context of struggle against fundamentalism, casteism and patriarchy cannot be answered within the framing grid provided by postcolonial theory where readers are instructed solely how to decode the subtle ironies and parodies directed against the departed colonizer. I think I need another theory. (20)

To sum up, the postcolonial theory deals with cultural contradictions, ambiguities and perhaps, ambivalences. It repudiates anti-colonial nationalist theory and implies a movement beyond a specific point in history (i.e. colonialism). Hence, postcolonial theory is transnational in dimension, multicultural in approach and a movement beyond the binary opposition of the power relations between the 'colonizer / colonized', and 'centre / periphery'.

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