

UNDERSTANDING POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND LITERATURE**Dr. Shrikant B. Sawant**Principal,
Gogate Walke College, Banda,
Sindhudurg**Abstract**

The term like 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' first appear in the late 1980s in many scholarly journal articles. By the mid 1990s, the term has become firmly established in scholarly writings and now postcolonialism usually refers to literature of the cultures colonized by British Empire. Postcolonial discourse was a result of the work of several writers such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Edward Said, Ashcroft et. al., Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aizaz Ahmad. The concept of Post colonialism concern with diverse and numerous issues highlighting the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another. Postcolonial literature and theory investigate what happens when one culture empowers and deems itself superior to other. Postcolonialism 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. Postcolonial situation has given our writers confidence to write creative literature in English.

Key Words: Colonial, Postcolonial, Orientalism, Mimicry, Hybridity, Subaltern, Eurocentric.

UNDERSTANDING POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND LITERATURE

- Dr. Shrikant B. Sawant

The concept of Post-colonialism (or often postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the second World War the term 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.

The terms like 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' first appear in the late 1980s in many scholarly journal articles and as a subtitle in Bill Aschcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's text *The Empire Writes Back : Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) and again in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin's *Past the Last Post : Theorizing Post-colonialism and Post-Modernism* (1990). By the mid-1990s, the term had become firmly established in scholarly writing and now postcolonialism usually refers to literature of the cultures colonized by British Empire.

'Postcolonialism or post-colonialism' (either spelling is acceptable, but each represents slightly different theoretical assumptions), as Charles E. Bressler defines, is 'an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries' (265). It usually

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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.

Postcolonial literature and theory investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them with its accompanying ideology empowers and deems itself superior to other. 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, postcolonialism 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 'postcolonialism' referring to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of the colonization to the present.

According to Bill Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 'The semantic basis of the term 'post-colonialism' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power' (1) and they refer 'postcolonial' to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day' (2).

As a historical period, post-colonialism stands for the post – secondWorld War decolonizing phase. Although the colonial country achieved political freedom, the colonial values do not disappear with the independence of a country. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly observes,

'Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it

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makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location (3-4).

However. 'postcolonialism' is defined, as 'it concerns itself with diverse and numerous issues highlighting the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another. In its interaction with conquering culture, the colonized or indigenous culture is forced to go underground or to *be* obliterated'. Only after the colonization the colonized people have had time to think and then to write about their oppression and loss of cultural identity. In HomiBhabha's words,

a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history — subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking there is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality__ transforms our critical strategies (172).

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 postcolonialism. The project of postcolonialism is not only applicable to the students of literature alone, indeed, it seeks to emancipate the oppressed, the deprived and the downtrodden all over the world.

'Postcolonialism' in the words of G. Rai,

is an enterprise which seeks emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class. Postcolonialism thus does not

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introduce a new world which is free from ills of colonialism; it rather suggest both continuity and change (2).

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.

Colonial / Postcolonial Discourse

Theories of colonial discourses have been hugely influential in the development of Postcolonialism. Postcolonial discourse was the result of the work of several writers such as AimeCesaire, Frantz Fanon, NgugiwaThiango, Edward Said, Ashcroft et. al. GayatriSpivak, HomiBhabha, AizazAhmad. 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 AimeCesaire. 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 covers a range of areas and has been influential in a number of fields, such as psychiatry, philosophy, politics and cultural studies.

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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. Ania Loomba 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.

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The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms. R. K. Kaul simplifies what Said calls the dogmas of Orientalism in the following words:

- (i) It was assumed that the West is rational, developed, humane, superior, the Orient is aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior, (ii) The Orientalist was guided by the classical texts in his attitude to the orient rather than modern oriental realities; (iii) The orient was considered to be unchanging and uniform, (iv) Finally since orient is incapable of defining itself, an objective assessment of the East must be made by the Western Orientalist. (62)

Leela Gandhi admits '*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 the adopting the colonizers' cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple

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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 interdependence 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

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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. 'The study of a colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said's, has blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak for. It is an important part of the discipline now'(65).

Women are twice colonized by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones. Kirsten Hoist Peterson and Anna Rutherford have used the phrase 'a double colonization' to refer to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the operation of colonialism and patriarchy. They argue that 'colonialism celebrates male-oriented myths such as 'mateship. The mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries' (9), while women are subject to representation in colonial discourses in ways which collude with patriarchal values. Much postcolonial feminist criticism has attended to representations of women created by 'double colonisation' and questioned the extent to which both postcolonial and feminist discourses offer the means to challenge there representations.

Postcolonial critics must remain sensitive to issues of gender difference in their work. Postcolonialism is significantly going to challenge male-dominance. Otherwise, post-colonialism will, like colonialism, be a male-centred and ultimately patriarchal discourse in which women's voices are marginalized and silenced.

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.

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Post Colonial Theory: A Critique

'Colonization' is generally taken mostly as a political process 'Colonialism' is very much a part of the power-dynamics operating in any human situation. The dictionaries, even Today, define 'colonialism' as a 'practice' by which a powerful country controls less powerful countries and uses their resources in order to further its own interests, wealth and power; but the word 'colonialism', in the last decade or so, has assumed several other senses, representing new notions that are dormant in the power-structure. It is not just political power alone that constitutes power and is used for domination and exploitation. There are several avatars of colonialism called neocolonialism – economic colonialism, cultural colonialism, linguistic colonialism, etc. ; such expressions are widely used in current literature. Exploitation and power-politics are innate human tendencies and to represent the different manifestations of the power dynamics.

Language and literature have always been used by colonizers as a powerful tool in the process of colonisation, be it political or cultural. It is very obvious that whatever knowledge, wisdom, science, technology, literary criticism and modernization that is projected as universal is actually Eurocentric, which again is essentially based on white, Eurocentric norms and practices. The critical questioning and rejection of this notion of universalism marks the beginning of 'post colonial' criticism.

Frantz Fanon in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* pointed out the need for reclaiming one's own past. Edward Said's *Orientalism* enlarged the scope of the postcolonial approach by exposing the Eurocentric universalism which establishes Western superiority over the East identified as the 'Other'. Said's work was followed by a number of interesting studies: Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1987), *The Empires Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft and others, *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi Bhabha, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by Edward Said and such other works accelerated the study of colonialism and its impact on other cultures, raising a number of vital issues.

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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.

No theory, either political or literary, can be totally objective. Postcolonialism can neither be rejected nor accepted fully. MakarandParajapestates,

The best way to begin interrogating postcolonialism is not by pretending that we am 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. (43)

Post-colonial situation has given our writers confidence to write creative literature in English and it would he 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, creaolisation, 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 heterogenous 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 he answered within the framing grid provided by postcolonial theory where readers

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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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