

UNDERSTANDING POSTCOLONIALISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the issues like 'identity', 'racism', 'language' to destabilishment of Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values and to expand the literary Canon, narrative Styles and the point of view. A brief introduction of postcolonial theory along with its origin at the outset, a brief introduction of postcolonial theory along with its origin and development is to be analysed here. Important writers like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Bill Ashcroft, Homi Bhabha's views are discussed in relation to this theory. An Analysis of several representative authors like Hardy, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Seamus Heaney, Chinua Achebe, Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster's, Albert Camus along with their works are examined in terms of postcolonial perspectives. Postcolonial theory is a controversial and complicated field. Postcolonial Studies have been topic of discussions, arguments and debates. This theory is called a presentation of the Eurocentric versions of the colonial History.

Keywords: Post Colonialism, Culture, History, Literature, Racism, Identity, Imperialism, Colonial, Hybridization. Euro Centrism etc.

INTRODUCTION

In English literature, post colonialism is a very familiar theory. Postcolonial theory can be defined as an analysis of the aspects of western culture and discourse that is responsible for the sustaining of the cultural impact of imperialism as well as the colonial enterprise on both colonizer and colonized. In one way, 'Post colonialism' is related to both colonialism and imperialism. Imperialism and colonialism are inter-linked. An imperialistic strategy involves the creation of a colony. According to Edward Said, as he defined in his Culture and Imperialism, "...Imperialism" means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'Colonialism' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on a distant territory.(Said,8)

MEANING AND DEFINITION OF POST COLONIALISM

The term postcolonial refer to a specific historical period after-colonialism" or after independence or can be called as "after the end of Empire" Basically this term has its relation to history and geography. The non-hyphenated term 'Post colonialism' refers towards a to a critical approach that seeks to challenge colonialism along with the meaning and values on what it depends. John McLeod opines here that, 'Post colonialism' is not just historical periodization but as referring to disparate forms of representations, reading of practices and values". Thus, this theory examines and analyses the aftermath of colonization and the effect of Colonial expression. (McLeod, 5)

Charles E. Bressler puts forth Post colonialism as, 'It is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries' (Bressler, 265)

As per Leela Gandhi, "Post-Colonialism is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the colonial past". (Gandhi, 4)

R. Young defines it as, "a body of Writing that attempts to shift the dominant wants in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed. Post colonialism seeks to force its knowledge into the power structure of the east as well as the non-east. It seeks to Change the way people behave and think. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures". (Young, 7) Post colonialism is a theory that focuses on the study of literary and socio-cultural heritage of colonial powers and aims at the impact of exploitation and hegemonic control of the people who were colonized. As a field of literary studies, post colonialism was introduced during the 1970s. The term, 'Post colonialism' represents the racial, social, ethnic and cultural identity in the modern world.

Gholipour and Sanah Madi opines, "...The postcolonial Studies deals with the art and literature produced by the Countries after their freedom from the imperial control of the colonizers. Postcolonial literary theory encompasses the literary products of the former colonies". (Gholipour & Sanah Madi, 2013)

According to Bill Ashcroft, "The post-structuralist theory has dramatically influenced post colonialism..." (Ash Croft et al, 1998)

About post colonialism, Robert Young puts forth, "For modern Europeans, ships were the key to colonization and the vast empires tentacles gradually crept across the world. Such vessels enabled not only the geographical expansion of populations but also enabled such population to stay in touch with their homeland. (Young, 16)

The European power are controlling the world in a new way. The new imperialism does not relate to the political or military instead it is a kind of culture imperialism like cinema culture, food culture, dress culture, multinationals corporates. Bill Ashcroft puts forth, "...the united nations continued to play a decisive role through international monetary bodies, through the fixing of prices on world markets, multinational corporations, cartels and a variety of educational and cultural institutions.(Ashcroft,162-163).Hence, this shows that the Europeans are imposing their culture through their multinational corporations. It can be said that cultural imperialism is basically the spread of global ideas and cultures and has also come to replace the formal imperialism and colonialism of the past.

BACKGROUND OF POST COLONIALISM

Postcolonial criticism emerged as a distinct category only in the 1990s. It has gained currency through the influence of such books as *In Other Worlds* (Gayatri Spivak, 1987) *The Empire Writes Back* (Bill Ashcroft, 1989) *Nation and Narration* (Homi Bhabha, 1990) and *Culture and Imperialism* (Edward Said, 1993)

UNDERMINE THE UNIVERSALIST CLAIM

One significant effect of post-colonial criticism is to further undermine the universalist claim once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics. The claim that great literature has a timeless and universal significance, demote or disregard cultural, social, regional and national differences in experience and outlook preferring instead to judge all literature by a single supposedly 'universal', standard. Thus, for instance, there is a routine universalist claim about the 'Wessex,' setting of Hardy's novels is like a canvas on which Hardy

examines the fundamental and universal aspects of human condition. Therefore, in Hardy's novels, universalism is rejected by the post colonialism. These novels are now not thought of as primarily regional or historical or masculine or whiter or working class novels. Hence, postcolonial critics called Hardy's novels as just novels, and built into this attitude with the assumption that this way of writing and representing reality remains in the unquestioned norms, so that the situation depicted in his novels can stand for all possible forms of human interaction. This universalism is rejected by post-colonial criticism because they thought that whenever such a universal signification is claimed for a work, then the white, Eurocentric norms and practices are being promoted by a sleight of hand to this elevated status, and all others correspondingly relegated to subsidiary, marginalised roles.

TO RECLAIM THEIR PAST

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Published in French in 1961, is referred as the ancestry of post-colonial criticism. This book show case the voicing 'cultural resistance' to France's African empire. Fanon (a psychiatrist from Martinique) argued that the first step for colonised people is in finding a voice and an identity to reclaim their own past. For Centuries, the European colonising power will have devalued the nation's past, seeing tis pre-colonial era as a pre-civilised limbo, or even as a historical void. Children both black and white, will have been taught to see history, culture, and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans. Thus, As per postcolonial perspective, the first step is to reclaim their own past, and then the second is begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which the past has been devalued.

EUROCENTRIC UNIVERSALISM: Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is another major book which inaugurated post colonialism. This book is a specific expose of the Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European and western and inferiority of what is not. Said identifies a European cultural tradition of 'Orientalism', which is a particular long-standing way of identifying the east as 'other' and inferior to the west. He says that the 'Orient' features in the western mind 'as a sort of surrogate and even underground self' (Walder, 236). This means that the east becomes the projection of those aspects this westerns do not even choose to acknowledge like the cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness and so on. Hence, the east is seen as mystical. It also tend to seen as homogenous; the people then become anonymous masses rather than individuals. Their action are determined by instinctive emotions like lust, terror, fury, etc. rather than by their conscious choices or decisions. Their emotions and reactions are always determined by racial consideration. They behave like this because they are Asiatic or blacks or Orientals. Rather than by individual circumstance or situation.

As Edward said says, after quoting the example of a colonial administrator's 1907 account of life in Damascus, 'In such statements as these we note immediately that "the Arab" or "Arabs" have an aura of apartness, definiteness, and collective self-consistency such as to wipe out any traces of individual Arabs with narratable life histories.

ETHNOCENTRIC / EUROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVES: Reading literature with the perspective of 'Orientalism' in mind, would make us critically aware of how Yeats in his 'Byzantium' Poems (*Sailing of Byzantium*, 1927 and 'Byzantium' 1932) provides an image of Istanbul, the eastern capital of the former Roman empire, which is identified with torpor, sensuality and exotic mysticism. This way Yeats adopts an ethnocentric or Eurocentric perspective, seeing the east an exotic 'other' which becomes the contrasting foil to his own pursuits and concerns, all of which the poem presents as normative. Edward said has written *An Essay on Yeats* which reads him in the context of post colonialism. (That is reprinted in

Said's Culture and Imperialism. Edward said views the desire, frequently expressed in Yeats' work, to regain contact with an earlier, mythical, nationalistic Ireland as typical of writers whose own position is postcolonial and this is closely related to Fanon's idea of the need to reclaim the past. Characteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create a pre-colonial versions of their own nation, rejecting the modern and contemporary which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries. Here, then is the first of characteristic of postcolonial criticism - an awareness of representations of the Non-European as exotic or Immoral 'other'.

LANGUAGE: AN AREA OF CONCERN: The postcolonial writer like Yeats has an uneasy attitude to the colonial Language is evident. He urged to the Irish poets that they should learn their craft, implies the need to serve a humble apprenticeship. This humble attitude to language may remind us of Stephen Dedalus's thought about the English language in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, especially in the early scene in which Stephen is patronised by an English priest because of this use of a local dialect word. Stephan tells himself 'the language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine...My soul frets in the shadow of his language'. The Irish poet Seamus Heaney in a poem entitled *The Ministry of Fear*, recalls his childhood unease and self-conscious about his pronunciation of English. Some postcolonial writers have concluded that the colonisers' language is permanently tainted, and that to write in it involves a crucial acquiescence in colonial structures. Language itself then, is a second area of concern in postcolonial criticism.

HYBRID/ DOUBLE/ UNSTABLE IDENTITY: Yeats being a member of the protestant ruling class in Ireland, has a double identity as both coloniser and colonised, and it is the recognition of such double identities which is one of the strength of the postcolonial view. The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe was also labelled with the tag of double identity. His first novel *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958, was criticized by an early reviewer for affecting to identify with African villagers when actually his university education and his broadcasting job in the capital city of Lagos, should make him identify with the values of 'Civilisation', supposedly brought to Africa by Europeans. Hence, this emphasis on identity as doubled or hybrid, or unstable is the third characteristics of the postcolonial approach.

This notion of the double or divided or fluid identity which is one of the characteristics of the postcolonial writers, explains the great attraction which post-structuralism and deconstruction have proved to be for the postcolonial critic. Post-Structuralism is centrally concerned to show the fluid and unstable nature of personal and gender identity, the shifting, 'polyvalent,' contradictory current of signification within texts, and the way literature itself is a site on which ideological struggles are acted out. This mind set is admirably suited to expressing the numerous contradicts and multiple allegiances of which the postcolonial writer and critic is constantly aware. This post-structuralist perspective is seen in the work of such representative figures as Henry Louis Gates Jr., Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. In all three of these, a complex Derridean-Foucauldian notion of textuality and fields of discourse is immediately apparent. Similarly, in all the three, the surface of writing is difficult and the route through to any consequent political action is necessarily indirect. This kind of Post-Colonial criticism roughly correspondence then to the theoretical 'French' feminist criticism associated with figures like Julia Kristeva or Helene Cixous.

THREE STAGES OF POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM: All postcolonial literatures seem to make transition. The double or hybrid identity is precisely what the postcolonial situation brings into being. In 1980s and 1990s, the shift in attitudes happened towards postcolonial writers seeing themselves as using primarily African or Asian forms, supplemented with European derived influences, rather than as working primarily within European genres like the novel and merely adding to them a degree of exotic Africanisation. They begin with an

unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models (esp. in the novels) and with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces entirely in this tradition. This can be called the 'Adopt' phase of colonial literature, since the writer's ambition is to adopt the form as it stands the assumption being that it has universal validity. The second stage can be called the 'Adapt' phase, since it aims to adapt the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre. The 'Adept' is the final phase, as there is a declaration of cultural independence whereby African writers remake the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. The characteristic of this phase is in the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent 'adept' in the form, not a humble apprentice, as in the first phase, or a mere licensee, as in the second. This stress on 'Cross-cultural' interactions is the fourth characteristic of post colonialist criticism. Hence, all these three phases provide then a way of seeing postcolonial Literature, then a way of seeing the stages of postcolonial criticism would be closely parallel to the developmental stages of feminist criticism. In the earliest phase, postcolonial criticism took as its subject matter the white representations of colonial countries and criticised these for their limitations and bias. Like the representation of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or of India in E.M. Forester's *A Passage to India*, or of Algeria in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. This corresponds to the early 1970s phase of feminist criticism when the subject matter was the representations of women by male novelists like D.H. Lawrence or Henry Miller. The classic instance of this phase is Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*. The second phase of criticism focusses on the explorations of themselves and their society by postcolonial writers. At this stage, the celebration and exploration of diversity, hybridity, and difference becomes central. This is the stage when the pioneer work 'the empire writes back' has come to scene. This corresponds to the 'gyno text' phase of feminist criticism, when there is a shift towards the exploration of female experience and their identities in books. A little further, there was a shift in feminist criticism between 'theoretical' and 'empirical' version. Thus, in postcolonial criticism we might see a split between variants very directly influenced by deconstruction and post-structuralism such as the work of Homi Bhabha and work like related with Edward Said's *Liberal Humanism*.

EDWARD SAID'S ORIENTALISM is the founder stone of postcolonial study. This book portrays the imbalance between the east and west by showing the superiority of west over the east. Said applied the terms and concepts as 'orient' the other and 'occident' to describe the relation between west and east cultures: "Orientalism is the first book in a trilogy devoted to an exploration of the historically imbalanced relationship between the world of Islam, the middle east and the 'orient' on the one hand and that of European and American imperialism on the other". (Gandhi. 9)

CONCLUSION

The term post colonialism, in the context of English literature is excellent and promising. Postcolonial criticism draws attention to the issues of cultural difference in literary texts. Post-colonial critics reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical western literature and seeks to show its limitation of outlook, especially its general ability to empathise across the boundaries of cultural and ethnic differences. Post colonialism foregrounds the questions of cultural difference and diversity and also examines their treatment in relevant literary works. They celebrate hybridity and 'cultural poly valency', that is the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture, for instance, coloniser, through a colonial school system and that of the colonised, through local and oral traditions. Postcolonial criticism develops a perspective whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential

change. This term raises possibility of a 'super-reader' able to respond equally and adequately to a text in all these ways. It deals with aspects like language, Eurocentric perspectives, imperialism, colonialism, hybridity, history, diaspora, gender, race, multiculturalism and to reclaim their past etc. Homi Bhabha, Spivak, Edward said are the important critics who developed postcolonial theory in English Literature. To conclude, it can be said that postcolonial writer revisions history and subvert the Euro-American ideologies and representations.

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