



Key concerns in Postcolonial Studies

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial studies is comparatively a recent literary discourse which provides a critical outlook to read, analyse and evaluate literature. It became a prevalent and prominent area of literary studies in 1990s. As a literary discipline, it looks towards literature pragmatically and politically, focussing on its ideological and material aspects. Primarily, it scrutinizes the literary outputs during and after the European colonisation from the colonised nations of Asia, Africa and South America. It analyses the social, cultural and historical effects of the colonisation. On the one hand, it emphasizes to reread and reinterpret the literature produced by the white colonisers that was implicitly projecting the Eurocentric model of life as the standard and superior one and on the other hand, it raises the voice of protest of the colonised subject for defining their essence and self-identity during their decolonising struggle and after getting freedom from the colonial hold. The subversion of the political and cultural hegemony which was attained with the subtle means of civilising and benefiting myth of colonisation is among the key concerns of this enterprise of postcolonialism. It also deals with the substantial issues like race, ethnicity, nation, culture, language, national literature, identity etc. This paper is intended to put some light on this domain of cultural and literary studies and discuss its scope and concerns.

KEYWORDS: *Ideological, Coloniser, Colonised, Eurocentric, Subversion, Hegemony etc.*

Introduction:

Postcolonialism as a key concern of literary interpretation looks back to the very history of colonialism from the point of view of the colonised. It evaluates the subjugation of different cultures by the European imperialistic powers. It counts the economic, cultural and psychological exploitation of the colonised by their white masters and addresses the role of language and literature in the very hegemony over the people of non-white races. Postcolonialism has the potential to critique the past and understand the present of the world. It deals with the questions of cultural differences and diversity. In the subsequent passages, the very process of colonisation and the issues dealt in postcolonialism are presented in brief.

The growing capitalism and industrialism in Europe in the 17th century gave an impetus to expand its empire across the narrow domestic boundaries. The territories in Asia, Africa and America with ample resources and potential for growth of trade and commerce were explored by the European merchants and the process of colonisation began and thereby a large number of countries became the colonies of Europe capable in every way for the consumption of fine products and in providing the raw material for European factories. In order to flourish their enterprise, the Europeans needed more than the markets and they started interfering with the political and social set up of the colonised countries and later they succeeded in achieving the full sovereignty over the colonies. Colonisation thus came into existence only for the sake of economic benefits, but it transgressed the very life style of the colonial subject, their culture, history, religion, law, tradition and convention, social and ethical values and turned everything upside down.

The success of this colonial enterprise was based on certain means besides trade and polity. The racial, ethnic and cultural differences between the colonisers and the colonised served as effective means. The colonial masters acknowledged those differences and they also constructed some other differences on their own to widen this gap between the masters and the subjects. The European literary and cultural outputs represented the colonisers and the colonised in different lights. The white always as gentle, cultured, civilised, rational, scientific, modern while the non-white as wild, savage, barbaric, sensuous, lustful, primitive were disseminated and these deliberately constructed identities were accepted by the colonised and the colonised natives felt colonisation a need in the colonies for civilising them. Thus the underlying imperial ideology based on difference won the cooperation of natives for their own subjugation. Works like Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands" and *Kim*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* are some of the examples that perpetuated these foster identities.

Now to understand and analyse this dramatic change in the very perception of human condition, human society or culture has been a great challenge for the intellectuals. The decolonisation struggle on the side of the natives in different colonies stimulated many thinkers, writers and patriots to challenge this slavish conception and get freedom not only political but also social and cultural. They went back to their pre-colonial pasts to define their essence and claim for their true identity different from the imposed one. The body of their works is now known as the postcolonial studies. The role English language and literature played in colonisation as well as decolonisation is the centre of their intellectual curiosity. Works like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*, Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*, Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and *The Postcolonial Critic*, Ngugi Wo Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* and "On the Abolition of English Department" etc. are served as the foundation and development of postcolonial studies and they challenged the very conception of art and literature.

Among its major concerns and objectives, postcolonialism challenges the universality of literature. It does not consider it as an aesthetic achievement serving all humanity beyond all boundaries of cultures and nations. For postcolonialists, literature reflects certain beliefs, values, traditions and institutions concerned to a specific society at a particular historical period. Literature is quite competent to serve the ideological and political ends. With this conception, it urges to reread the colonial literature and question the imperialistic representation therein serving the Eurocentric model of life. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a direct address to Joseph Conrad's depiction of Africa in his novella *Heart of Darkness*. It also demonstrates that the natives must go back to their precolonial pasts and acknowledge their own history, culture, traditions and beliefs to subvert the colonial identity and seek their true self.

As far as the domain of literary studies is concerned, postcolonialists challenge the European standards for both the creative as well as critical writings. The canon of literature is questioned because it does not accept and acknowledge the literary outputs from the colonised nations and marginalises them as worthless trifles. Postcolonialism seeks more inclusive approach towards the literary studies across the globe. The experiences of the every part of the world deserve to be acknowledged and shared with due respect to the every diversity it exhibit.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it can be said that postcolonialism is a very competent field of study to view and understand the current world order and its foundation in the colonial past. It provides a new dimension to view history itself. Many contemporary issues of today's globalised society like transnational conflicts, migration and the changing demographic structure, communalism and racism, terrorism etc. which had their seed in the very phenomenon of colonisation in one way or the other may be addressed and dealt with. It may serve as a meaningful prospect in resolving these tensions and maintaining the diversity and inclusion by acknowledging the otherness of others with reverence.

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