

Postcolonialism: Implication and Assimilation

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Postcolonialism is a literary theory that deals with literature produced in the countries which were once colonies of other countries. Historically it refers to the period after the decolonization. Philosophically it signifies a paradigm shift by which reality is newly and differently interpreted from the perspective of the colonized rather than that of the colonizer. It sets itself to examine the transformation of a people adjusting themselves to changes in ways that have altered the very character of the imperial culture itself. The manner and the ways the postcolonial cultures which resisted the might of the colonial domination was so complex that it influenced and transformed both the imperial and the native discourse. Whether seen or not the colonizer's presence is felt even after he has left. The colonizer remains in the consciousness manifesting itself into a hybridism, a multi-culturalism which is the essence of assimilation.

Understanding the term

Postcolonial studies entered the mainstream debate in 1980s with the publication of **The Empire Writes back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial literature** by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989). Subsequently, there has been a plethora of "introduction" to the field. The term 'postcolonialism' is applied at different levels of critical inquiry, resulting in a variety of jargon, methods and bits of theory, all paving way to Sulitlify the issue rather than clarifying then. Students and researchers may encounter expressions like postcolonial, postcolonialism and the other derivatives; the term itself remains elusive and contested. The term may refer to the methods by which one group, class, race, caste or gender is kept in a position of marginalization. It may also refer to specific text by writers from /on colonized countries. Further, postcolonialism may refer to psychological, social, cultural conditions or to concrete historical, economic and political processes.

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The term 'postcolonialism' implies several things at once and hence, it is difficult to draw a conclusive definition. Primarily, it refers to a complex of anti-colonial critical strategies that emerged in 1950s and developed momentum in the 1960s. It refers to nativist insurgency and resistance to the hegemonic, racist practices of the colonial rule. It is "interdisciplinary, appealing across a range of subjects, with a particularly strong base in literary and cultural studies....it designates at once and at the same time a chronological moment, a political movement and an intellectual activity and it is this multiple status that makes exact definition difficult", write Gilbert, Stanton and Maley (1989).

The postcolonial theory deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. The original use of the term as was used by the historians after the World War II such as 'post-colonial state', 'post-colonial' had a chronological significance referring to the post independence period. However, since late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various effects of colonization. In the words of Charles E. Bressler (1999:265) "Postcolonialism is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly colonized countries". This usually excludes literatures that represents either British or American viewpoints, and concentrates on writings from colonized cultures in Africa, Caribbean, India and other places and societies that were once dominated by European cultural, political and philosophical tradition. At present, these countries/states share a common history of colonial domination, the imposition of the English language and British ways and styles, loss of indigenous cultures, psychological dependence and servility. Hence the rejection of the western hegemony forms the nucleus of the postcolonial rhetoric which, in turn, creates space for marginalized groups of disadvantaged nations. Although the colonial countries achieved political freedom, the colonial values do not disappear with the independence of countries. Meenakshi Mukharjee (1996:3-4) rightly observes, "...not merely a chronological label... [but] an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it 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 text 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"

The genesis of postcolonial theory is the experience of colonized people's frustrations, their cultural clashes with the colonizing culture, their fears, hopes, and dreams about their future and their own identities. The manner and the ways, the colonized people respond to changes in the language, subject matters, race and class differences, and a host of other discourses, including the act of writing become the context and the theories of

postcolonialism. The scope of postcolonialism not only concerns the students of literature but also seeks to emancipate the marginalized and oppressed across the globe. In the words of G Rai (2005:2): "Postcolonialism is an enterprise which seeks emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class. Postcolonialism thus does not introduce a new world which is free from ills of colonialism, it rather suggests both continuity and change."

Changing Perspectives:

As a critical ideology, postcolonialism has acquired various interpretations. It combines and imports elements from post-modernism post-structuralism, socialism, feminism and environmentalism. The term 'post-colonial' functions as a historical marker referring to the period after the official de-colonization. On the one hand, it indicates an end of political authority and on the other hand, an opening of a field of inquiry and understanding. It is also a term signifying changes in intellectual approaches, a paradigm shift by which reality is newly and differently interpreted from the point of view of the colonized rather than the colonizer. Colonization may then be understood to be political and local, cultural and racial or based on the hegemonic divisions of gender, class and caste. To view experience from the point of the hitherto marginalized and voiceless, calls for a new dimension to research and its related activities. It calls for re-reading of culture so as to reposition the marginalized lives of the ruled exploited and oppressed in ways that will both include and amplify the significance of these lives. Postcolonialism becomes a "tool...a methodology...of examining, most often through literature what happens when two cultures clash, based upon one of the culture's assumptions of his superiority" (Zandra Kambysellis).

The concept of marginalization/subordination is better understood in terms of binary relationship: dominant versus repressed, ruler versus ruled and colonizer versus colonized. In such contexts, it is necessary that the activities of the ruling class be seriously studied to which the subordinated are the subject. The fact is that the canonical history only highlights the very silence and virtual invisibility of the subaltern lives. Therefore, postcolonialism research aims at systematic rediscovery into subaltern concerns, the lives and experiences of the Other, the Periphery which has long been kept hidden, deliberately suppressed, distorted and misunderstood or ignored. The central agenda of the postcolonial research is both to address subaltern experience through the interest of the dominant classes/cultures and also in their own terms to create theory grounded in the actual lives and language of oppression.

Theory of the Other

In *The Intimate Enemy* (1983, XI), Ashish Nandi presents two kinds of colonization: the physical conquest and the colonization of mind, body and cultures. Elaborating the colonization of minds, Nandi observes:

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within 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 and outside; in structures and in mind.

Imperial dominance was a process that took the form of a mostly unconscious cultural and psychological assimilation, and insistent economic and political indoctrination which was to represent the native as the other who is Different and Inferior. As Edward Said points out, "the Orient was almost an European inversion...a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes remarkable experiences" (Mongia, 2002:20). Hence the imperialist needs to create an Other, an Orient in order to establish himself as the Centre. Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of "Otherness", where the native perceives himself as the Other and functioning from the margin in relation to the Centre.

An Aesthetic of Subversion and Reclamation

Postcolonialism as a critical theory is a method of interrogating a unconsciously changed culture through its literature. In the common imagination colonization has been represented as relentless ethnocide in which indigenous cultures were ruthlessly distorted or eliminated. Therefore, a strategic postcolonial resistance aims at the revival of indigenous cultural identity to redress the effect of imperialism. It exploits the Derridean deconstructive strategies and subversive modes like hybridity, orature, mimicry, ambivalence etc. for destabilization of Eurocentric order of thinking and thus punctures the all pervasive view in contemporary discourse of giving "a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities and peoples" (Homi K. Bhabha, 1994:71). In other words, postcolonial resistance provides a means of reclamation of cultural past and resistance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices can be challenged. "As postcolonial literature has revealed time and again, appropriating the dominant technologies of representation to communicate the reality the colonized world can also transform the cultural bases of that representative process" (Ashcroft, 2001:112).

Postcolonialism sets itself to examine the transformations of a people adjusting themselves to changes in ways that have altered the very character

of the imperial culture itself. The attempt to understand the process of "trans-culturation", how postcolonial cultures resisted the might of cultural domination in ways so complex that influence and transform both the imperialist and the native. According to Ashcroft (2001:12) the effect of postcolonialism begins at the first moment of colonial contact "and doesn't stop when the colonizers go home". The assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic as well as oppressive. "Postcolonial theory is transnational in dimension, multi-cultural in approach and a movement beyond the binary opposition of the power relations between the colonizer/colonized and centre/periphery" (B. K. Das, 2004:233).

Postcolonial assimilation

Trans-culturation is the result of an act of cultural survival enacted by the postcolonial intellectuals, which despite their disempowerment and disadvantage respond to the western culture through imitation ('mimicry'), insurgency, representation and negotiation. Postcolonial literature is the most sensitive record of these small but enormously significant acts of staying alive. Anti-colonial resistances have taken many forms. These movements drew upon western ideas and vocabularies to challenge the colonial rule. They often hybridized what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with the indigenous ideas. There is a 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. Symbolically the Caliban illustrates the logic of 'protesting' out of rather than against the cultural vocabulary of colonialism. Whether seen or not, the colonizer's presence is felt even after he has left. The colonizer remains in the consciousness giving way to a hybridism, a mixing of culture or multi-culturalism, which is essence of assimilation (Jose, 2003:25). In the words of Mukharjee (1996:6-6): "Although post colonialism came out of colonialism and finds its significance in its opposition to colonialism, in its development it shifts away from the meta narratives of western humanism on the basis of which colonialism was justified. Colonialism gets subsumed into post colonialism, the view "from below" and "behind" subverts the canonical, Eurocentric interpretations as texts are deconstructed from within, and colonialism itself no longer exists except from within the postcolonial context."

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