

Subversion: A Postcolonial Device of Reconstruction

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Index Terms - Colonialism, colonial apparatus's theories of part colonialism, colonial circumstances.

MEANING AND DEFINITION

Living in the twenty-first century and bearing witness to the fast-changing global scenario, one is left with intuition that shapes his /her perception of the world. The individual's perception of the world, at many times, is the outcome of certain societal rituals underwent during his /her developmental stage. These rituals in the form of familial conditioning and societal programming have always tried to impose upon an individual well-accepted thought-process, a thought-decorum only to make him/her servient to it. From the early days, the children are given the views, opinions which have been in return given away by their fore-fathers. The child acquires his perception of the world not by actual experience but by a decent conditioning done on him or her by his or her in-laws. This is particularly so in case of the people from 'once-colonized countries'. The child's notions of ethics, morality, science, reality, truth and all other sacred aphorisms are exclusively shaped by the people in power. Power is one of the most influential paradigms in the pretext of colonial venture. As it is observed that colonialism is foremost an agency that strives hard to make the colonized accept the set-values and set-beliefs of the colonizers. By exploiting the indigenous cultural matrices, they grapple hard to sustain the venture in the name of wealth, riches, profits and all those contours that the dreadful lust aspires of. It creates an unusual dichotomy among the colonized people and helps reduce the socio-cultural set-up. The existence is filtered through the divisions that beckon a hybrid environment. In the midst of many colonial apparatuses, the notion of language has always been a starting point for the colonizers in justifying their so-called mission of civilizing the territory. Language, as Ngugi wa Thiongo [1986:16] writes, "carries culture,

and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world".

The concept of language cannot be denied since it affects our perception of culture, politics and social reproduction of wealth. It is the civilizing force that carries with itself a specific form and character to evolve a reasoned community of human beings. Various books on colonialism bear the witness to the fact that it is the system of language that had been a crucial ingredient for the colonizer to help them justify their regime in the colonized lands. Whether they be Africa, Caribbean, Bangladesh, India, the British Imperial ideology strove hard to indoctrinate their assumptions, values, belief-systems through language. With the indoctrination of the language of the colonizer in the ruled territory opened up new possibility to explore the indigenous psychic resources and as a matter of fact, it got juxtaposed with the always-existing linguistic paraphernalia of the native land. The land wherein the colonial agency at work does have their own systems of thought often reflected in language and is, in one sense, a matter-of-pride for the indigenous people.

The colonial intrusion in foreign lands does give the colonizer an opportunity to explore the unhygienic conditions of the territory and through the internalization of the Education system, they transmit their upheld notions. To mention, Lord Macaulay's infamous Minutes on Indian Education does articulate the colonizer's urgent need to formulate the efficient work resources that would eventually be servient to them. The opening of missionary schools, colleges, universities help the colonizer sell their opinions, views, perceptions and this policy tarnishes the colonized's intrinsic ideologies. Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1986) can be seen as a focal point in discussing the viable structures created out of colonial intrusion. The Eastern lands which he calls as Orient, are always held in derogatory terms and are considered

as barbarous, primitive, uncivilized, an object of study in academia. Contrast to it, Occident, a vital seat of knowledge, modern, civilized and is treated as superior. The unusual dichotomy created by the colonial agency produces a petrified personality among the inhabitants of the occupied lands. The colonial agency ponders on the varigenettes of the colonized and with the internalization of the colonial paraphernalia seeks, rather forcibly and coercively, to impose upon the inhabitants. More often than not, the colonial venture in the Middle Eastern lands had been successful in transmitting its ideology by encouraging loot, massacre, arson etc. over the period of their official stay. Slowly it geared up momentum and took control of almost all the important offices including trade and commerce, intellectual sector. In a colonial set-up, in the midst of imposed penal code of conduct and officious legal decorum, the indigenous human resources fall in turmoil and have nothing but to accept rather nonchalantly the imposed codes. This tarnishes the socio-cultural matrices of the occupied lands and duality becomes a matter-of-fact. Aime' Ce'saire [1995:25] writes, "Whenever colonization becomes a fact, the indigenous culture begins to rot. And among the ruins something begins to be born which is not a culture but a kind of sub-culture which is condemned to exist on the margin allowed by the European cultures. This then becomes the province of a few men, the elite, who find themselves placed in the most artificial condition deprived of any revivifying contact with the masses of the people". The emergence of sub-culture in the occupied lands evinces the dilogic processes wherein the colonizer obliterates everything from the memory of the colonized. By changing the names of the streets and installing statues of his local heroes, the colonizer internalizes the myth of inferiority among the colonized and gets it reaffirmed through the education system. This strategy belittles the colonized personae and helps generate apathy for their own culture. The native folk culture, local history, local literature and the indigenous ways of living are destroyed and are replaced by the so-called 'knowledge' approved by the colonizer, the Occident. There are various ways through which the colonial agency succeeds in sustaining its agenda. The British colonial agency, down the centuries, is one such institution that exercised its total control over the lands such as Africa, Caribbean, India, Bangladesh and most of the south-Asiatic states. The colonial space

populated by the colonized generates among them, as Memmi [1965:108] argues, "a linguistic drama where the colonial consciousness conflict with dual psychological and cultural realms that eventually lead him realize the inadequacy of his own social system, culture, race and language.

From the above discussion it becomes quite comprehending to conceive of colonialism as an imposing institution that ventures hard to forcibly upset the existing codes of the indigenous territory. Over the periods, the colonial agency had not been successful in transfusing its ideologies, it, at times, met with certain oppositional phenomena in the colonized lands. In the state like India, it often met with resistance by the native intelligentsia, who through literature generated the anti-colonial sentiments among the colonized and helped build anti-colonial consciousness. The elite few of the upper crust of society drawn from the various regions of the states became instruments to revive the invaded consciousness. Among many a domain instrumental in building anti-colonial consciousness among the colonized, literature has been influential since it generates indigenous sense and sensibility. However, in an environment of filtered personality and cultural invasion, the colonial self is entrenched with the alien vision. V.S.Naipaul [1964:1] writes, "It [English Literature, my emphasis] diminished my own and did give me the courage to do a single thing like mentioning the name of Port of Spain...It helps in most practical way to have a tradition...The English language was mine, the tradition was not". The hybrid self of the colonized population of India in the British regime is structured in 'twoness' which forms the core of the letters of colonial consciousness. The resistance literature, as it has been upheld, is an attempt to evolve a counter-discourse or a counter-hegemonic discourse, as Jan Mohammed [1985:62] argues.

The novels of colonial consciousness weaved through two phases of colonialism. Jan Mohammad [1985:62] argues, "As the dominant and the hegemonic". In the "dominant" phase, which starts with the establishment of a colony and ends near its "independence", the natives are under direct military and bureaucratic control of the colonizer; "during the phase, the consent of the native is primarily passive and direct. At the stage of dominance the native is not subjected, though his land is. His culture also remains fairly integrated because the colonizer labels both the native and his

culture “savage”. By contrast, in the hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism) the natives accept a vision of the colonizer’s entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and more important, mode of production”. It is generally the second phase in which the novels of colonial consciousness are produced.

The theories of postcolonialism argue that postcolonialism is a continuous process from the very advent of colonial contact. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Helen Tiffin [1989:117] write, “Post-colonialism, as we define it, does not mean post-independence or ‘after colonialism’, for this would falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of oppositionality which colonization brings into being”. The oppositional sentiments against the “dominant” discourses of the “centre” in the colonized lands like India are reflected through the resistance literature produced in an environment of utmost desire of total Independence. The anti-colonial artifacts of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao et.al., the propagation of ancient Indian spiritual heritage by Dayanand Saraswati and revivification of Hinduism by Swami Vivekanand are the paraphernalia which beam out, as Barbara Harlow[1987:75] identifies, “as Heterogeneity”, “fractured genres”, “polymorphpus” subjects, “borderland sites”. The novel writing in the colonial space embarks upon the retrieval of invaded conscience and as an “act of atonement”. Wole Soyinka [1990:105] calls it, “race retrieval”, as an essential job of a postcolonial writer when he says, “it involves, very simply, the conscious activity of recovering which has been hidden, lost, repressed, denigrated or indeed simply denied by ourselves- yes, by ourselves also but definitely by the conquerors of our peoples and their Euro-centric bias of thought and relationships”. As it is observed, colonialism places people outside history and generates antipathy for their own culture and treats them neutered objects on the whole tabula rasa, the clean slate of mind. In order to evolve a unified society, independent nationhood, a counter-strategy of the nationalist fervor becomes the need of the time to up throw the text of the master race-cultural, economic, and religious and so on. In the context of India, although colonialism is believed to be institutionalized with the establishment of the East India Company in the 17th century, the process of colonization, however, began much later. From the

early 17th century to the mid nineteenth century, the Empire geared up momentum in captivating all the important offices with the certain amendments of judicial provisions and proved to be all-pervading power to the local inhabitants. The process became more formalized as a policy with Lord Macaulay defense of the east India Company 1833 and his Minutes on Indian Education 1835 culminating in the Crown Act 1858 vesting all power with the Queen. But the great mutiny of 1857 stands as a signifier of the turn of events for it is for the first time, people revolted against the colonizer that eventually inspired all the people from all the regions and it culminated in the assertion on independence in 1947.

From the literary point of view, the job of the writer of the novels of colonial consciousness was to evolve the spirit of retrieval attending on history, Arts, Culture, Science since these “meta-narratives” are generated as European constructs and written by the colonizer. Parallel to the anti-colonial consciousness reflected through the counter-military hegemony and counter-ideological struggle, the strategy of retrieval on the part of the colonized intelligentsia surmounts certain processes such as decolonization of mind and language. Unless this was done, the polarity between master and slave, black and white would have never been rejected. Ashish Nandy [(1983) 1989:2] propounds his thesis which reads that economic gains and political power were not the primary motives of the colonial power. He further argues that colonialism is a state of mind in the colonizers and the colonized. The proof according to him lies in the fact that even 35 years after the formal ending of the Raj (it should read 59 years), the ideology of colonialism is still triumphant in many sectors of life. The colonial mentality is still perpetuating. It is the language English that justifies the colonial grid in “once-colonized countries” now. The preference of Indian parenthood of sending their wards to English schools, the prescription of English “Classics” in the syllabi of schools and universities, the proliferation of print capitalism and Western media soups etc. are the indictment of the fact of the privileged position English enjoys in the country. The contention Aijaz Ahmed [1992:283] asserts, “The responsibility lies with the teachers of English. He says that it is high time we decolonized our minds and stop taking pride in Fullbright and other similar scholarships. He writes, “Without any sense of social superiority, we should

adopt a utilitarian attitude towards English as it is the dominant expressive medium of discursive thought and emphasize a compartmental manner in relation to other Indian languages and literatures. It is only “by connecting the knowledge of that (English) literature with literatures of own, that we can begin to break that colonial grid”.

The writers in the postcolonial space voice against the dominant discourses of the centre by evolving counter-hegemony. The essentialized corpus of the dominant discursive practices seem to evoke a sense of subversion; an attempt to reconstruct the defined notions by the centre among leading men of letters from “once-colonized countries” such as R.K.Narayan, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh et. al. John Macleod [2000:34] asserts, “Rethinking conventional modes of reading is fundamental to postcolonialism”. The advent of newer critical inquires in the realms of literature, arts, sociology, history such as structuralism, post-structuralism and postcolonialism, the institutionalized and canonical notions seek to abort the deterministic concepts and by revising, reinterpreting and re-appropriating, the writers attempt to subdue unrealized intentions imbibed in the consciousness. The officious decorum of History, Culture, Science, Ethics, and Morality are shaped and shuffled. In so doing, the writers anticipate new codes of recognition which eventually transfix all-encompassing cultural tradition. Often, the writers experiment on the peculiar narrative framework which would help them brings to light all those unrealized, unfelt segments of truth. They involve in a variety of challenging modes such as Writing-back-attitude, allegory, subversion, historiography only to render the objective perception of reality. Aijaz Ahmed [1992:124] writes, “the essential task of a ‘Third World’ novel, it is said, is to give appropriate form (preferably allegory, but epic also, or fairy tale or whatever) to the national experience. The range of questions that may be asked of the texts...must predominantly refer, then, in one way or other, to representations of colonialism, nationhood, post-coloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions and so forth”. This is quite characteristic of a postcolonial writership to evolve cultural reorganization and cultural renewal. In the colonial space, the writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao et. al. breathed out the revivification of

cultural realm with their liberal humanistic perspective. And in the postcolonial mentality, the writers staggered ahead more radically to sustain in the reorganization of the dismantled and repudiated corner stones of colonial agency.

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