

Post-Colonialism and Literature: A Brief Survey

Dr. Gurpreet Kaur

Assistant Prof. & Head of Post Graduate Department of English, Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Khalsa College, Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India

Abstract - This paper aims at studying briefly how and when colonialism came into being and how it flourished and took shape into Post-colonialism, followed by its visible impressions in literature. Post-colonialism, if etymologically defined, is 'after colonialism', basically, the aftermaths of colonialism.

Index Terms - Colonialism, Post-colonialism, literature, writers.

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is believed to have emerged around the time of Renaissance reaching its peak during the 19th century. But after the World War I and II, it saw its decline probably due to the exhaustion of imperial powers and lack of required control to be maintained and also because of no possible moral justification of continuing colonialism. 1950s and afterwards saw a lot of resistance in various colonized parts of the world, like Algerian war of independence against France, the Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya, the dethroning of Egypt King Farouk, etc. Along with the armed struggle, there was intervention at the cultural and aesthetic levels in the form of postcolonial literature, writings by the postcolonial subjects about postcolonial subjects and their sufferings, their experiences during the colonial period.

These postcolonial writings shared common thematic parallels. Writings from different countries and cultures expressed the pain of suffering and resistances, and happiness of triumph to gain independence. These writings were imbued with the sense of displacement and alienation in one's own land and within one's own psyche. Loss of identity and alienation was also found in such literature. Postcolonial criticism was an overtly political approach that grew immensely concerning the political, social, economic and psychological effects of imperialism and emancipation from colonization. Basically, there have been three major phases of imperialism. Period between 1492 and mid-eighteenth

century saw establishment of colonies in Spain, Portugal, England, France, Netherlands, America, the East-Indies and India. Then there was a period of immense scramble for imperialistic power in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and other countries between the period of mid-19th century and World War I. End of the nineteenth century saw one-fifth of the world countries under the control of British Empire. After British Empire, France became the next largest colonial power. Second World War was followed by the period of struggle of many countries to gain independence.

Aime Cesaire *Discours sur le colonialism*, and France Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* are the seminal texts of Post-colonialism. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) was based on the analysis of 'the conditions and requirements for effective anti-colonial revolution from a Marxist perspective, modified somewhat to accommodate conditions specific to colonized nations' (160 Habib). The founding movement of postcolonial theory, according to Robert Young, was the journal the *Tricontinental* in 1966, which 'initiated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism' (Young 5).

More such writings emerged like Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), *The Postcolonial Critic* (1990) by Gayatri Spivak and writings by Homi K. Bhabha and Benita Perry. For Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, postcolonial is a term 'used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day' (quoted in Habib 161).

Young has tried to enlist certain aims of postcolonial criticism: re-examining the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; participating in the goals of political liberation; determining the economic, political and cultural impacts of colonialism on both the colonized people and

colonizing powers; analysing the process of decolonization.

The possible motives behind colonization and imperialism could be economic. Some other benefits could be security of the home state; related to social Darwinism. For Machiavelli, Bacon, Hitler and Mussolini, imperialism was a part of the natural struggle for survival. A profound figure Rudyard Kipling, through his poem "The white man's burden" gave imperialism a moral perspective, which means bringing to a subject people the blessings of a superior civilization and liberating them from their benighted ignorance. Nayar in his book *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* writes, 'Colonialism emerged out of this process of industrial modernity and its capitalist modes of production' (154).

According to Nayar, "colonialism can be described as the process of settlement of Europeans in Asian, African and South American territories". Further, he adds that it is an 'exploitative mechanism' (Nayar 154). But many commentators like Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor and even Mahatma Gandhi believed this colonialism to be something more than political power only. For them it was a slow and gradual erosion of native's cultural values and trends. Basically it was racial by nature.

Postcolonial theory aims at exploring the questions of racism within colonialism, letting colonial powers to represent, reflect, refract and make visible native cultures in particular ways (155 Nayar). This theory believes that all sorts of fields like colonial writing, science, legal systems, arts, are in every sense racialized and an unequal where the colonial does the representation and the native is represented.

When the colonized countries gained freedom after a long struggle their foremost task was to rebuild their lost strength and resources. The writers of these countries aimed at writing about both colonialism and its impact on the culture and values of their Nations. Their duty was to try and resurrect their lost cultural values and fight with the misconceptions held for their countries.

Aime Cesaire's essay 'Discourse on colonialism' (1955) brought to the front terms like 'negritude' which highlighted the cultural achievements of the coloured people by resisting Western hegemony.

Post-colonialism made efforts to change the closed mind set of academia by providing an insight to deal with the reality from an objective perspective.

Colonialism began when the need for resources and market grew exponentially after industrialisation. Sea routes were discovered, military conquests, nations were economically exploited. They used 'divide and rule' policy as done in the case of India. They studied the nations, thoroughly and culturally dominated them. These nations were full of potential for exploitation. They created an image of themselves being superior to the natives. For the Western scholars represented the colonized countries to be irrational, sentimental, foolish, bizarre, mysterious and exotic. One who has read E.M. Foster's *A Passage to India* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* will very well agree to this. So the aim of postcolonial literature is to change these notions.

Writings like Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) gave an insightful study of psychological and sociological factors inherent in colonialism. Fanon opines racism to be an aftermath of colonization. The native accepted himself to be backward, inferior, uncultured, etc. and white man to be superior, cultured, especially to be a 'man'. Mahatma Gandhi in India and Franz Fanon and Aime Cesaire in Africa have been considered as anti-Western scholars. Later came Edward Said's *Orientalism* considered to be the Bible of the postcolonial critical theory. Said believed colonialism to be a cultural as well as military-cum-political project. Orientalism is actually a biased approach of the Western colonial powers.

Later on terms like hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence related to colonial discourse were put forth by Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994).

He writes about the relations and attitudes of the colonized and the colonizers in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (1984). He talks about the creation of a man half-English and half-native, a hybrid who cannot be like the white man and does not want to remain what he actually is. He gave a term 'Hybridity' which is a state of 'inbetweenness'. He runs between two cultures. Bhabha writes: "In the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white', in the margins of metropolitan desire, the founding objects of the Western world become the erratic, eccentric, accidental objects *trouvés* of the colonial discourse- the part-objects of presence. It is then that the body and the book [Bible] lose their representation authority" (92).

Another important prominent postcolonial theorist, an American Indian, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote a seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1983). She questions whether the colonized, marginal, subordinates do have a voice or not. M.H. Abrams has defined ‘subaltern’ as a British word for someone of inferior rank, and combines the Latin terms for ‘under’ (sub) and ‘other’ (alter)’ (238). Spivak argues because of the prevalent structure of colonialism which prevents the speaking, the subaltern cannot speak for him/herself, especially colonized women due to colonization and patriarchy both. She believes that there can be no comparison between western women and the colonized women belonging to the Third world.

Malik in his book *A New Approach to Literary Theory And Criticism* writes, the exploitation on the basis of caste, creed, sex, race and sexuality, is condemned as ‘internal colonization’ (148).

Basically, postcolonial studies can be interpreted as two things: one, the study indulging in writings by postcolonial writers, usually narratives of colonies colonized by England; two, study of the discourse and literature of imperialism. Postcolonial studies bring with it many names and concepts like orientalism, diaspora, hybridity, mimicry, creolization, etc.

During the colonised period, forced migration of labour was very common, but after the countries became free, people moved due to economical reasons. They migrated from cultural conditions to the other and consequently some faced problems, they could not culturally integrate. They were ill-treated. There was lot of discrimination. Postcolonial literature credited itself with exploring the ways to lessen these problems.

REFERENCE

- [1] Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford U. P. 2000.
- [2] Dwivedi, A.N. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Doaba Publication, 2014.
- [3] Guerin, Wilfred L. et. all. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Ed. V. Oxford U. P. 2007.
- [4] Habib, M. A. R. *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2007.
- [5] Malik, R.S. & Jagdish Batra. *A New Approach to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Atlantic, 2014.
- [6] Nayar, Pramod. K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Pearson, 2009.
- [7] Ryan, Michael. *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Ed. II. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- [8] Young, Robert J.C. *Disseminating the Tricontinental*. London: Routledge, 2018