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Exploring the Elements of Postcolonialism and its Exponents

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Abstract

Postcolonialism is an academic discipline that analyses, explains and responds to the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism. The purpose of the present study is to examine the postcolonialism and elements of postcolonialism such as marginalization, identity, multiculturalism, racial discrimination, hybridity, mimicry etc. The article discusses the thoughts of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak on postcolonialism as well.

Keywords: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Marginalization, Identity, Multiculturalism, Migration, Hybridity, Mimicry

Postcolonialism is a current movement of thoughts and a theory, and deals mainly with the effects of colonization on the culture and thoughts of colonized societies. What are the

changes that occur after colonized countries get freedom from the colonizers and the Literature that is written examining this aspect and related issues is called postcolonial literature. As Tonny Myers states:

Postcolonial literature can be defined as literature produced by countries that gained independence from colonial rule in the twentieth century. In 1900 the British Empire covered a pink swathe of the globe that included the Indian sub-continent and other parts of Asia, much of Africa, Australia, Canada, Ireland, many Caribbean islands as well as numerous and scattered smaller possession (207).

The term can be defined to signify extensively the political, cultural, economical and linguistic effect on former European colonies. Postcolonialism also analyses the cultural differences between the colonizers and the colonized, the orient and occident and between black and white. In the words of Leela Gandhi, “Postcolonial theory recognizes that colonial discourses typically rationalizes themselves through rigid opposition such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/ barbarism, developed/ developing, progressive/ primitive” (32).

Further, postcolonialism attempts to decentralize Eurocentric norms and constructs the identity of the native; it counters the assumption that western and European culture is superior to Eastern culture. As Peter Barry explains, postcolonial writers evoke a pre-colonial version of their own nation and culture which was spoiled by the colonizers during the period of colonialism and they reject the modern and contemporary colonial status of their countries:

If the first step toward a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had be devalued (186).

Generally, the literature written after the withdrawal of imperial power from the territory of the native people is called postcolonial literature. The term ‘postcolonial’ came after the term ‘colonial’ and was based on the theory of the superiority of European culture or Imperial culture. Colonial literature means the literature written by native people including the writing by Creoles and indigenous writers during colonial times.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the theory of postcolonialism and its elements such as marginalization, crises of identity, hybridity, multiculturalism, racial discrimination, cross cultural relationship etc. I have discussed too the thoughts of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak on postcolonialism.

The term ‘postcolonialism’ was used approximately after the 80s. Imperialism became a concept of the past. Now all native countries that were colonized by England are in the process of trying to retrieve their lost identities, identities that were almost destroyed. Their own culture, literature, and language were affected by the colonizers. Postcolonialism is a period/phase which tries to find a lost history and identity.

Long before postcolonial, there were anti-colonial political movements in almost all colonized countries such as India, China, and Japan etc. These movements were successful and many colonized countries won independence and established local self-governments. Postcolonialism refers to all cultures that were affected by the colonial or imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. It analyses and examines what happened

during colonialism and what were the effects of colonial oppression on the natives. It also analyses the literature that was affected by the imperial process and the literature that was written in response to colonial domination. Postcolonialism tries to unmask or disclose the operation and political and economical ideologies during the period of colonization. According to Pramod K. Nayar:

‘Postcolonialism’ is the theoretical wing of postcoloniality. It refers to a mode of reading, political analysis, and culture resistance/intervention that deals with the history of colonialism and present neo colonial structures... It is, in short, a critique. It invokes ideas such as social justice, emancipation, and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation (*Postcolonial*. . . 17).

In this sense, postcolonialism is a companion to postcolonial theory. It resists any kind of colonizing practices and opposes systems of domination by any power.

Postcolonialism emerged in the early 90s of the 20th century and Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Homi Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1980), and Helen Tiffin and Bill Ashcroft’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) are significant works that have contributed to the area.

Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon is an important figure in the field of postcolonialism and the literature of the later twentieth century. He was born in 1925 in French Antilles and educated in Martinique and France and was a trained psychoanalyst. Based on his experiences as a psychoanalyst he wrote two of the most influential texts related to postcolonialism - *Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) which examine the effects of colonialism on the indigenous people of a country. Being a psychoanalyst, Fanon observed the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonizer and the colonized. Referring to *Black Skin, White Masks* John Mcleod remarks:

In a narrative both inspiring and distressing, Fanon looked at the cost to the individual who lives in a world where due to the colour of his or her skin, he or she is rendered peculiar, an object of derision, an aberration (20).

Fanon states that colonialism destroyed the very soul of natives and they are represented as evil, pagan, superstitious and uncivilized. The colonizers were the centre, the self, and the colonized were the margin and the ‘other’, Mcleod seconds this statement, “The colonizers are civilized, rational, and intelligent: the ‘Negro’ remains ‘other’ to all these qualities against which colonizing peoples derive their sense of superiority and normality” (Mcleod 21). The natives, according to Fanon, begin to accept the Eurocentric views about themselves. They lose their sense of self and identity because they begin to see themselves with the eyes of the white man losing their power of logic, rejecting their own culture, religion, language and following western religion, language and traditions. It is just like a white mask on a black skin. But in spite of the efforts of the coloured man to emulate the white man, acceptance doesn’t come. They remained the ‘other’, making the natives realize that they could not become truly white and that they must regain their lost identity or self.

Therefore, they began to decolonize Eurocentric norms and culture and most important, their own minds. They began to reclaim their own culture, religion and tradition. They created their own history and literature freeing themselves from the shackles of colonial power.

Fanon was not in favour of the concept of a stable or traditional culture and argues that the culture must be dynamic not static. It should be open to change, it must be evaluated so that it can be changed. He said that though the struggle with the colonized comes to an end with political independence, in actuality, it does not end but still continues because even after getting independence, the influence of the colonizer continues.

Edward Said

In the field of postcolonialism *Orientalism* by Edward Said is landmark book. It is a study of western colonial power over the orient. Edward argues that Orientalism is the European ideology that sees the East as pagan, savage, undeveloped and criminal. He describes how western colonial powers represented the North African and Eastern lands in their writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. European colonial powers interpreted the literary work of the native from the stand point of their already existing misconceptions and ideas and native ideas and opinion were ignored. As M. S. Nagarajan states, “*Orientalism* is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. It is the result of the arrogant and overbearing attitude of the twentieth century European imperialism” (187). It is a description of how western powers during colonialism represented the East, how the history, music and literature of the native were constructed as pagan, primitive and requiring reform and how this process continues. Ways of thinking and perceiving have become set and are resistant to change. Thus, even after acquiring political Independence, cultural and economic dependence continue to linger. The East is still considered weak, poor and uncivilized.

Orientalism is one of the most important works in the field of literary theory, cultural studies, and human geography. Said argued that Europe and the Orient were represented as opposite to each other in literature and history. Europe was all that the Orient was not - developed, civilized and Christian; Orient was undeveloped, uncivilized and non-Christian. The European saw the Orient as different, but Orient also had ideas, opinions and it was not pagan and uncivilized. Said argued that western writings on the orient were untrue and couldn't be taken at face value. Europe could not deny that places like India or African and Arab countries had been civilized for centuries, but the civilizations of the east had remained at the level of their early achievements. So, the orient could not progress and its culture remained static and unchanged. On the other hand Europe's culture developed.

Western views about the East were not based on facts but rather on assumptions about the orient claims Said. Europeans were not able to understand the actual situation of the East or the Orient. They were not able to empathize with the orient and their views which were based on their speculations, dreams and fantasies were not authentic.

‘Orientalism’ creates binary divisions between the Orient and the Occident. The Orient is regarded as ‘inferior’ and the Occident ‘superior’. The west is given a higher rank and considered the land of knowledge while the Orient is regarded as the ‘other’ - the land of

ignorance. Likewise, the west is regarded as ‘masculine’ - active, rational and dominant while the Orient is ‘famine’ – passive, irrational and submissive. Said concludes that western writings depict the orient as irrational, weak, and other. It is contrasted with the rational, strong, masculine ‘west’.

Homi K. Bhabha

Bhabha is also a leading figure in the field of postcolonialism. His works are representations of colonial power on the colonized and the native. He argues that the identities in the colonial encounter are never stable. The European constructs his identity through his relationship with the colonized/ native on the basis of difference between European and native.

The colonizers establish their identity by positioning themselves in opposition to the natives. All identity is based on the difference of one’s letter/ sound/ signifier from another. Identity is constantly shifting, relational, displaced not static, stable or fixed.

Bhabha additionally clarifies his concept of mimicry in his work 'Of Mimicry and Men' and he contends that mimicry is imitation of the white man by the native. Bhabha further contends that the native has been instructed that he should resemble a white man. Mimicry is brought to the native through culture, religion, fashion, literature and music. At this stage colonial authority breaks down. In the colonial encounter between native and European, the native becomes Anglicized but never truly white or European. The native is a mimic man who can now get respect in the colonial establishment and use logic and reasoning in argument which has been taught by western education.

Bhabha argues that Mimicry is not fully successful and it fails because though the colonial master on the one hand wants that the native be similar to the white to aid in the colonial enterprise, on the other hand he also wants to keep him in a separate category and think that he is weak, uncivilized with a slave mentality. Bhabha calls mimicry ‘sly civility’- the mimicry of the native is considered deeper disobedience by the white. This dual state of mimicry is termed as hybridity. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is that the native refuses to acknowledge the colonizer’s position and authority. Now the native is placed in a position between adopted Englishness and original Indianness. The native is in a situation of dualism.

Gayatri Spivak

In her essay ‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’ (1985), Gayatri Spivak questions the ability of the subaltern to speak. Subaltern means the marginalized and oppressed class. In this essay she tries to disclose the condition of the native during the colonial period and condition of women in the postcolonial period. She argues that the colonial powers prevent any voice of speaking. The native woman is doubly jeopardized in the structure of colonialism and patriarchy. She argues that one can make his/her identity through discourse. As Pramod k. Nayar states:

Discourse is, of course a regime of representation that is controlled by power. This means, an individual cannot develop an identity without being the subject of a discourse over which s/he may have a little or no control. The subaltern is one who

has no position or sovereignty outside the discourse that constructs her as subject (*Contemporary Literary* . . . 171).

Gayatri Spivak further argues that the subaltern cannot speak; the native woman or subaltern woman has no power of speaking because she remains within the discourse of patriarchy and colonialism.

The late twentieth century saw the emergence of the Subaltern Studies Group which critiques the way history has been written. It holds that history is a metanarrative constituted by many parallel speaking voices, each one valid. The Subaltern group recognizes this validity. The subaltern subjects are not able to express their feelings and thoughts but their opinions are expressed by their representatives. Spivak also critiques the presumption of those who appropriate the speaking voice of the subaltern. She adds that the representation of the subaltern is an effect of western discourse.

The written works of Australia, Canada, African nations, Bangladesh, Caribbean nations, New Zealand, India, Malaysia, Malta, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Singapore, South Pacific Island nations, are all postcolonial literature. Postcolonial writing attempts to recover the historical backdrop of the colonized and presents history according to the colonized perspective.

Elements of postcolonialism

Marginalization, Identity, Multiculturalism, Hybridity, Mimicry, Migration etc. are elements of postcolonialism. Marginalization occurs when some groups of society are kept on the edge by a dominant group. People may be marginalized socially, politically or economically. Marginalized people have to struggle for their livelihood, don't have their fundamental rights and are exploited by society. They are deprived of opportunities and access to all those things that enable one to improve the quality of one's life. They are given labels of different castes and class. Economically they do not get good jobs because it is thought that this group of society is not capable or deserves or is able to keep good jobs. So this group of society faces exclusion, social injustice, and inequality. Marginalized people are kept far from the centre of development; they live their life on the edge of poverty. On the basis of the above description marginality can be divided as follows:

1. Societal marginality, 2. Political marginality, 3. Economical marginality
4. Spatial marginality

Societal marginality is represented by poor livelihood since the marginalized people don't have sources, skill and opportunities to properly provide for themselves. Their participation in public decision-making is restricted, they are not allowed to use public services, and they are discriminated, ignored and sometime suppressed on the basis of race, religion, caste, region, education, culture, occupation and gender by mainstream society. There is a big disparity between marginalized and mainstream.

Political Marginalities: In this type of marginality, marginalized people are not allowed to take part in the politics of the state, they are ignored, and don't even have the right to vote as the women in U.S.A. were not allowed to cast their vote before the 1920s.

Economical marginality: It is so called because it is based on the economy of the state; there is a great inequality of wealth between the marginalized and the mainstream. The Marginalized have little money and get low wages and they don't have opportunities to get economical equality.

Spatial marginality is usually related to geographical remoteness of an area from the central zones of Economy. Marginalized people are sent to remote areas that are difficult to access due to lack of transportation, have no proper houses to live in and no necessary facilities are provided to them.

Gender, age and disability are important components of marginality both in developed and developing countries. Gender inequality is a great problem leading to marginality; it affects the employment and income potential of women and their ability to overcome limitations.

It can be summed up that to reduce marginality we should reduce social, economic and political disparities among people, so that marginalized people may be empowered to reverse disadvantages into potential by improving their livelihood options and promote cooperation of differences, where diversity can serve as an influential positive.

The next element of postcolonialism is identity which simply means features and characteristics of a thing or a person by which that thing or person is recognized or formulates dignity, pride or honour and has a position, class or a standard in society. As Meena Kelkar and Deepti Gangvane state:

. . . a thing or person is identified as having some peculiar characteristics, some relation with other things or persons. In principle, it is possible for any individual (thing or person) to have a fairly large number of characteristics and relations. In practice, only some of these are used for describing the identity of an individual and ascribing a name to it (25).

People can use identity to allude to individual qualities or characteristics and highlights that can't normally be communicated as far as a social class. As per the Oxford English Dictionary identity is, "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances, the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else, individuality, personality." In the words of J.K. Tina Basi, Identity:

. . . takes its position between these two locations; it can be regarded as the individuals conscious sense of self that has moved beyond identification with others and has itself become moveable; it is not biologically, but historically and politically defined. Identity is therefore is not fixed, but unstable, fluid, often contradictory, and always in process (21).

Identity may be divided into parts as:

- (1) Personal identity (2) Social identity (3) Natural identity
- (4) National identity (5) Religious identity (6) Cultural identity

(1) **Personal Identity:** Everything or person has his/her personal attributes, qualities, it may be a feature or an element by which he/she/it has a reputation, recognition in the society, these attributes may be his/her personal virtues and faults as good habits, or bad

habits, physical appearance, feelings, desire, personality, way of talking, or the colour of one's skin.

(2) **Social Identity:** Rousseau said “the human is a social creature” so he lives in groups and each group has its own identity. In a caste structured society, everyone belongs to a caste. The marginalized castes struggle to create their own identity and women also are in search of their own identity because on so many levels they are marginalized and are thought of without their own social identity.

(3) **Natural Identity:** Woman and man are different in their sex and have their own natural identity. Even plants, trees, animals, and insects etc. have different shapes or appearance. People's appearances are different from one another, some people are tall or some are short, some are white or some are black. We are born with this type of identity.

(4) **National identity:** Each nation has its own identity in the world. People are called Indian, American, English, Australian, Chinese, and Japanese etc. because they belong to their countries respectively.

(5) **Religious identity:** People all over the world have their religious identity. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist etc. are the religions in the universe and the people of these religions are different in their rituals, dressing styles, and manners of living.

(6) **Cultural identity:** It is based on manmade norms to live in the society and it may be different from country to country, religion to religion, and region to region as the culture of Kerala is different from Uttar Pradesh, it is different in language, manners and food habits. But although they may be different in styles, but all people have their own cultural identity. India has different cultural identities. Identity cannot be defined in one definition; there may be so many definitions of identity. They vary from time to time. As Radhika Seshan states:

Identity is the vital aspect of one's position in both the natural and the social world. At the most elementary level, the identity we have is natural we are humans, belonging to the human species. But this elementary identity itself implies the complexities that follow, for, as part of the species, there is sense of a group identity, or a social identity (178).

Multiculturalism is also an element of postcolonialism and it can be defined as a relationship between or among people who belong to different cultural environments, and who are born and brought up with different life styles. Each culture has its dogma, practices, style, fashion and habits. Multiculturalism may be within a country or may be outside the country. As John McLeod states: “Western countries like Britain and America have a variety of Diaspora communities whose values, cultural practices or religious beliefs differ from those of the majority” (227) as do the relationships between North and South Indians because the cultures of the South and North are different from each other. This relationship may be for business, or may be due to migration for better livelihoods and opportunities.

Migration is another element of postcolonialism. Migration means movement from one place to another by a person in search of better opportunities. Migration may be within a state or a country and it may be outside of a state or a country. During the period of postcolonialism people of the colonized country started migrating to the colonizer and other

developing countries. A large number of Indians have migrated to England and America, Canada and Australia. Migration may be permanent or temporary. There are so many causes of migration as lack of opportunities, lack of food and work. Religious crisis may be a cause of migration. People migrate for a variety of reasons; the reasons may be may be political, internal crisis and external war with other countries. Migration could also be due to climate changes resulting in natural disasters as earthquakes and floods. People move from place to place because they consider the advantages and disadvantages of staying and moving, as well as factors such as distance, travel costs, travel time, modes of transportation, terrain and cultural barriers. They also make a calculation between work and wages. There are some good factors for migration such as better food supply, pleasant climate, freedom and better system for immigrants and refugees. Desire of a new place depends on its social, political, economic, or environmental situation. If it is better the people would like to go to a new place.

Next significant component of postcolonialism is hybridity. Hybridity alludes in its most essential sense to blend or a cross between two separate races or societies. The term starts from science and was subsequently utilized in phonetics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. The important scholars of hybridity are Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak.

Postcolonialism deals with the effects of colonialization, its ramifications and its impact on cultures and societies. It constitutes an important area of scholarship and discourse and is manifested in the writings of the most respected authors of our times.

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