



POSTCOLONIALISM AND POSTMODERNISM: DECONSTRUCTING THE EUROCENTRISM

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ABSTRACT

Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: Five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives. The former had the Word; the others had the use of it.

Frantz Fanon

In this paper, the researcher looks the possibilities of cross stream relations between postmodern philosophy and postcolonial theory. The critical attitude of postmodernism helps to ground the intellectual revolutions against the imperialistic vision of colonialism. It critiques the power of knowledge to deconstruct the European imperialism and Eurocentric epistemology. In the present paper, the researcher has applied the qualitative and interpretive methodology. Moreover, the text focused working method is used to interpret the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, the leading strategists of the postmodern age. It is found that they set the direction of the movement and enriched it against the reason, truth and knowledge oriented approaches of modernism. In cognizance of this, the texts of the intellectuals of third world countries; Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Chinua Achebe etc., are analysed here as corresponding to the voice of the post-modern vanguards. They, in line with postmodern thinkers, questioned the Eurocentric approaches of colonial empire. Postcolonialism, in response to the colonial version of reason and reality, claims that in the name of so-called 'reason, truth and knowledge' western civilization has always wrought its superiority on Asian and African countries. A succinct study of postcolonial and postmodern thinkers reveals that the truth represented by the colonial body of text is one way of thinking. Therefore, metaphysically they challenged the power of knowledge and believe that it was a colonial strategy to

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propagate an imperialistic reality to impose the superiority of Caucasian culture over the Asiatic and Africans. While, concurrently, epistemologically they criticize reason and also emphasize on the subjective version of reality and repudiate the Eurocentric notion of objective reality. They disregard the objective reality which western authorities used to colonize the thoughts and the ideas of the native people.

INTRODUCTION

Deconstructionist reading of the colonial texts rejects the possibility of any objective meaning in the text and emphasizes to deconstruct such claims of reality and objective interpretations. Deconstruction, as a literary theory, invites the reader into the 'subjective play' where he feels free to do and say whatever he feels like. Here the words of Stanley Fish seem appropriate to quote. He shares, "Deconstruction relieves me of the obligation to be right... and demands only that I be interesting." (Fish 1982: 180) Sometimes deconstruction is misperceived as a superficial game of 'wordplay' that misguides the reader's perception and ability to analyze the text meaningfully. However, deconstruction, targeting the fundamental issue of language, encourages the reader to look critically at the things. Derrida believes that

"language is not the reliable tool of communication we believe it to be, but rather a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experiences in which ideologies program us without our being aware of them." (Tyson 2006: 249)

Postcolonial critics look into the colonial mission as an organized strategy to control the native polity and economy. Moreover, the colonizers mainly sabotage the natives at the level of ideas. They propagate the non-white community as barbarian and savage and consider it a holy duty of the whites to civilize them. In 1871 in *La Reforme et Morale*, Ernest Renan, an orientalist, supports the rise of imperial stewardship for civilizing the non-western people around the world.

The regeneration of the inferior or degenerate races, by the superior races is part of the providential order of things for humanity.... Regere imperio populous is our vocation. Pour fourth this all consuming activity onto countries, which, like China, are crying aloud for foreign conquest.... Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity, and almost no sense of honour; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of the tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race....Let each do what he is made for, and all will be well. (Said 2000: 418-19)



The colonial body of text advocates the restablization of the savage nation to better government and civility 'to civilize them, to govern them properly'. In the colonial text knowledge and representations were the tools the west used to dominate the east. So, Postcolonialism examines and analyses the aftermath of colonization, and the effects of colonial oppression over the Asiatic and Africans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her book *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* remarks, "There is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism" (1988: 202).

Postcolonialism and postmodernism have emerged during 1980s. Both the terms shared relatedness in terminologies and their engagement in critiquing the Eurocentric dominance and imperial control of reason and epistemology. Post Modernism helps a reader to the better understanding of post-colonialism. Theorists claim a clear and strong relationship between post-coloniality and post-modernism. Both, post-colonialism and postmodernism, in the core of their nature, "contest the imperialist devaluing of the "other" and the "different." (Hutcheon 1989: 161) The Post-modernism vanguards Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, provide an intellectual platform for the post-colonial debates.

Derrida's emphasis on the use of language and binary opposition critiques the assumptions of western thoughts by deconstructing the hierarchical "binary oppositions". He examines that the so-called 'structure' determines all the discourses and shapes the episteme of western science and philosophy and it also presupposes a 'centre' that ensures a point of representation to all the epistemological debates. West holds the language and representation to pose their authority on the East. Derrida argues that language is wholly ideological. Language programmes our experiences of the world and ourselves. He uses structuralism's idea of 'binary opposition' to prove his thesis that our experiences are determined by the language we use. In the context of post-colonialism, deconstruction helps to critique the idea of 'power structure' or 'hegemony'. He critiques the idea of binary opposition that one term in the polar opposites is privileged and other is non-privileged. Thus, he claims binary opposition a cultural production. European culture (in novels, films, conversations, etc.) has been represented as superior to the Asiatic and African culture. The politics of 'Othering' constructs the dominant European self. The European sense of superiority is constructed in the polar opposition of African, Asian and Arab, the inferior 'Other'. West uses language and representation as tools to dominate the East. Structure determines the 'center' that made the discourse on sided. Postcolonial claims that every representation of the East by the West is a misrepresentation. It was one way of looking at the world. Colonial texts, as observed by post-colonial critics, represents East as 'other', and attributes the qualities which west do not want to attribute to themselves. The east, in the colonial body of text, is represented as irrational, depraved, fallen, childlike, different, thus Europeans, as binary opposition and privileged, are rational, virtuous, and natural. Post-colonial thinkers took Derrida's principles



to examine the colonial strategy to privilege the West over the East. The language and representation were used to persuade the local population to accept the European version of reality. They were made dependent on West even to understand their own social world. Deconstruction backs Post-Colonial thinkers to critique the modern epistemology as white male Eurocentric approach imposed on non-whites and privilege East as a new 'centre' of polar opposites. Deconstruction also questioned the imperialistic notion of objectivity. The imperialistic idea of autotelic nature of literary text has been severely criticized and the discipline of rethinking or rewriting of the canon was encouraged to question the Eurocentric aesthetics norms. Derrida in his essay "White Mythology: Metaphor in the text of Philosophy", reveals that "the very structure of western rationality is racist and imperialist." (Gandhi 2009: 26) The post-colonial rejection of the 'standard language' of colonial texts reminds Derrida's theory of deconstruction. Non-European writers reject the colonial version of Standard English and modify the language to suit their indigenous purposes.

Michel Foucault and his questioning of "discourse" and "governmentality" of the West is a crucial factor in the production of the theories of decolonization. Foucauldian analysis has been taken widely in postcolonial theories. There has been a cross stream relation between Eurocentric philosophy and postcolonial theory. Hence, Foucault's analysis of western discourse which has been politically motivated to impose the dominance of West on the non-western people is used as a focal point in the development of postcolonial theory. Foucauldian critical attitude provides a theorization and textual analysis of the Eurocentric philosophical discourse and deconstructs the imperial functioning of the Eurocentric discourse. Edward Said, a prominent thinker of post-colonial theory, accepts his indebtedness to Foucault. Foucault's impression on post colonialism can be seen through Edward Said's Orientalism. In this landmark work, Said's analysis of orientalism as discourse reminds Foucault's use of the term in Archaeology of Knowledge and Discipline and Punish. He accepts-

My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment era. (Said 2000: 25)

The "textual attitude" of Foucauldian discourse led a foundation to the analysis the body of colonial texts as to seek the dominance of the west over the east. Thus Foucault started a system of textual representation that "allows one to study colonialism through the repetition of a set of linguistic and textual referents that draw their effective force from the authority of the system of textual representation itself rather than the actuality it purportedly describes." (Said 2000: 93) Foucault's equation of knowledge and power critiques the western knowledge



production as a politically motivated institution that confirms the privileges and authority of western epistemology and pedagogy.

Jean-François Lyotard, in his famous work, *The Postmodern Condition* 1979 reveals western inclination to reason as a tool of power. He states "Reason and power are one and the same" (Rainer 1999: 46) His report on postmodern condition strengthens postmodernism as an activist strategist to expose the coalition of reason and power. He claims the reason has been used to exercise the power and to establish imperialism. Postmodernism critiques the reason and the foundations of truth and serves to, "spot, confront, and work against the political horrors of one's time" (Lentricchia 1983: 12) to the purpose of social change. He, expressing agreement with Foucault, equates reason and power with "prisons, prohibitions, selection process, the public good." (Rainer 1999: 46) Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* "presents us with significant methodological operations, which, although they draw on a whole very rich contemporary tradition of narrative analysis nonetheless strike a relatively isolated and unusual note in the whole range of contemporary philosophical research." (Lyotard: VIII)

Lyotard in his another influential work *The Differend* critiques the Eurocentric Linear models of history, which he believes, disregard the heterogeneous perspectives and affirm the authority of single perspective. He challenged such authority and argued upon the western epistemology and instigates a debate on grand-narratives. His definition of the term differend as "a conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments" (Lyotard 1988: xi) questions the ethics of meta-narrative. Moreover, Lyotard helps the post-colonial thinkers to reexamine the criteria of western terminology of truth, objectivity and rationality.

Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* 1978, is taken a remarkable text which "effectively founded postcolonial studies as an academic discipline" (Young 2016: 383). The critics like Spivak consider Said's *Orientalism* a 'founding text' or 'source book' of colonial discourse. It is a canonical text where "the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important part of the discipline now" (Chakravorty 1993: 56). For many others, especially Indian university teachers of English Studies, Said's *Orientalism*, as they claim, helps them to discuss the western literature more effectively. *Orientalism* makes a revolutionary impact on the non-west academia. Said argues that the West, particularly Great Britain and France, uses the knowledge and power to create the version of Orient for Western conceptions that has little to do with real orient. *Orientalism*, like an 'organized science', was an organized form of writing for the political motivation of European material civilization and culture. He suggests that the colonial culture, through, power, knowledge and representation constructs the native as the radical 'Other'. "The African or Indian native is primitive, pagan a Non-modern as opposed to different from the modern, advanced, Christian white. Thus within the pairing of the self Other, colonial cultures place a certain set of values



on each of the categories: the European self is superior to the African Other." (Nayar 2015: 06)

Said, in line with Foucault, equates knowledge with power and believes that knowledge leads to power. He argues that Western knowledge of East leads to Western control over the East. Their knowledge of East enables them to represent the East from their perspectives. The West represents the East in many ways. But, Said argues, every representation of the East by the West was a miss-representation. The textual representation of the East as barbarian, exotic, sensual, cruel presents them opposite to civilized, normal, rational and just West. Said shares-

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire. If this definition of Orientalism seems more political than not, that is simply because I think Orientalism was itself a product of certain political forces and activities. Orientalism is a school of interpretation whose material happens to be the Orient, its civilizations, peoples, and localities. (Said 1977: 188)

Gayatri Spivak, a devout critic of postcolonialism and third world feminism, in her influential work, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, presents a brilliant critique of the discourse of imperialism. Spivak makes a deconstruction study of imperialism, Eurocentric epistemology, European philosophy, history, literature and culture. Her association with Derrida and deconstruction helps her to interrogate the practices of established politics. At the time of the publication of *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 1999, postcolonialism had become the most debatable issue of academia. Spivak's book clears her stand to keep a distance from mainstream postcolonial literature and makes a defence of Marxism and feminism. Spivak's most acclaimed and most awaited book *Can the Subaltern Speak?* has received enormous attention since its first publication in 1988. The subaltern of the title, Spivak explains, a term conveys to those who are lower in economics and social status. They represent the masses that exist outside the power structure of the established society. The term subaltern was first popularized by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci in his famous book *Prison Notebook*. Inspired by Gramsci, a group of Indian scholars, headed by Ranjit Guha, formed themselves into the Subaltern Studies. Spivak's question in *Can the Subalterns Speak?* is a direct response to the works of this group. The term speak is not literal for Spivak but she metaphorically questioned that can the people with no political, economical and cultural power express their concerns into dialogue with those who are in power and control the institute of power? She further questions that if they do speak, write or any way communicate their concerns, but their utterances cannot be heard by the power structure. Spivak argues that even if the subalterns do speak, write or communicate but the state power or non-state power has no infrastructure for them to have their speech act. In the



conclusion of the book, she answers No to the question and argues that the subalterns cannot speak and emphasis that the female intellectuals must speak for the subalterns. Spivak adapts Derrida's techniques of deconstruction in her postcolonial studies. She has also talked about representation but, unlike Said, she doesn't see the colonial operation as monolithic and believes that it is not only the colonizers who represent the colonized as other but there have been the layers of representations. Explaining the concept of strategic essentialism, Spivak exposes the colonial strategy of essentializing and stereotyping the non-European subject. Like Edward Said's Orientalism, Spivak also believes that the colonial intellectuals homogenize everything and everybody in the east as masses. They never saw them as individuals. They fixed native culture and behaviour as static and unnatural to essentialize the colonial superiority. She argues that such essentialism was constructed through the colonial discourse of the native which programme the native subjects to see themselves as natural inferior to the colonial masters. Spivak reveals strategic essentialism as a political response and resistance to colonial essentialism. In response to colonial essentialism, she argues, natives also essentialize their own cultural heritages, not as universal as European did, but specific to their local purposes to battle with colonial essentialism.

Homi K. Bhabha, another leading voice in postcolonial studies, has been greatly influenced by post-modern theorists, notably, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault and Jacques Lacan. His contribution in post-colonial theory is generally marked by his introduction to many challenging concepts, as Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, the Stereotypes, the Uncanny, etc.

It is Homi Bhabha's usage of the concept of hybridity that has been the most influential and controversial within recent postcolonial studies. Bhabha goes back to Fanon to suggest that liminality and hybridity are necessary attributes of the colonial condition. For Fanon, you will recall, psychic trauma results when the colonial subject realizes that he can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, to shed the blackness that he has learnt to devalue. Bhabha amplifies this to suggest that colonial identities are always a matter of flux and agony. It is always, writes Bhabha in an essay about Fanon's importance of our time, in relation to the place of the other that colonial desire is articulated, correct. (Loomba 1998: 148)

Bhabha, in his famous book *The Location of Culture* (1994) in line with psychological concepts of Lacan, uses a term ambivalence "to refer to the odd fascination and phobia that co-exists in the colonizer's attitude toward the colonized...the European colonial wishes at once to reform the native into being more like him". (Nayar 2015: 8) The European colony, according to Bhabha, essentializes the East into a homogenous identity. Moreover, the Ambivalence reflects a colonial wish to make the native more alike the colonizer. The



purpose to make them "more white, more Western, more Christian, more Modern" (Nayar 2015: 8) is to encourage mimicry of the colonizer. The term mimicry, even before Bhabha, has been intimated by Frantz Fanon in his *White Skin and Black Mask*. Through knowledge and representation, white masters imposed the superiority of their literature and culture to convince and realize the native subject that his own literature and culture are inferior and the adoption of the Western way of living would make him more civilized and modern. It results in the mimicry of the Western cultural forms where the native subject would seek to be more like the colonial master. The colonized subjects are the 'mimic men' who always feel an outsider at their own home in the colonial master's culture.

Bhabha, like Derrida, considers language as a source of the negotiation of cultural meaning and the economy of identity which bind colonizer and colonized together. He further put the history and cultural legacy of colonialism as responsible for the present cross-cultural relations. Thus he sees colonialism both as a period of oppression, violence and dominance but at the same time it provides the opportunity to the cross-cultural and multi-cultural interaction.

Thus, the writings of the post-colonial and post-modern writers share either commonality in language and terms or seem inspired by each other. Most of the contemporary authors are, at the same time, post-colonial but post-modernist too. The writers such as E. L. Doctorow, Graham Swift, Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Angela Carter, Amitav Ghosh, Chinua Achebe, etc have shared the self-reflexive nature of post-modernism and historical and political actuality of the colonial period. Their writings prove a clear link between postcolonial and postmodern. The way postcolonialism functions as a theory or evolves as a discipline shares many commonalities with post-modernism. The post-colonialism, in approach, terminology and nature, seems a post-modern response to the colonial attitude. Colonization was covering the world under the umbrella of modernism but the post-colonial counter to the colonial strategy is a postmodernism of the eastern world. In response to the colonial version of reality, truth and justice, whatever come forms the beginning of post-modernism in the East. Talking the Eastern countries in terms of postcolonial is postmodernism.



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