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Post Colonialism: A Form of Literary Criticism

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Abstract

This short article surveys the development and scope of post colonialism as a form of literacy criticism. Colonial expansion has been a recurrent phenomenon of our history. Many literacy and non literacy documents have been produce either supporting or opposing colonialism. Some of them even explore the influence of such practice on culture human condition and identity. The critical analysis of such literacy documents especially focusing not only on economic and military issues but also on human identity and cultural interaction is the area of post-colonial criticism.

Keywords: Ambivalence, criticism, mimicry, othering, post colonialism, unhomliness

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Introduction

Colonialism generally refers to forcible territorial occupation and exploitation of natural and other resources for economic benefits of other countries. It has been a recurrent and wide spread feature of human history. The empire of Alexander the Great and Roman are the example of ancient time colonialism. The early modern European colonialism generally took the form of overseas colonial expansion. In that period, many competing states established political control over territories in South and Southeast Asia. The European colonial systems were practiced according to the doctrine of mercantilism: each imperial state attempted to control the trade of its colonies in order to monopolize the benefits of that trade. This modern colonialism is the most extensive of different kind of colonial contact. By the 1930s, colonies and ex- colonies covered 84.6 percent of the land surface of the globe (Gandhi 5). During the 19th century Britain emerges as the largest imperial power. By the turn of twentieth century, the British Empire ruled one quarter of the earth surface including India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland and significant holding in Africa, the West Indies South America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia (Looma 7).

British colonial domination continued until the end of the world war second. When India gained independence in 1947 and other colonies followed the suit. During the colonial period, the colonizers produced various government and non-government discourses to justify their colonial mission claiming their inherent superiority against the enforced inferiority of the colonized.

Colonial Ideology and Discourse

In order to rationalize their exploitation many nineteenth and twentieth century European writers equated the advance of European colonization with the triumph of science and reason over the forces of the superstition, and indeed many colonized people took the same view. Across the colonial spectrum, European technology and learning were considered as progressive. The colonizers claim that their purpose was to civilize the barbaric people. But the hidden motifs behind the expansion of the colonialism were to exploit natural as well as human resource and to expand their trade and monopolized the market of the colonized nation. The colonizers develop the discourse infusing their colonial ideology in order to justify their colonization and sustain their domination by ensuring subjugation of colonized people. The colonial discourse assumes the superiority of colonizer by contrasting with the alleged inferiority of native people. The colonizers believe that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized and sophisticated. The pre-colonial native culture, religion customs etc. were demoralized and suppressed. The native people were defined as savage, backward and undeveloped.

The colonizers regarded themselves as proper self who has all qualities of civilized human being and native people were considered as other; different and inferior. Such practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human, in post colonial critics' language, is othering. Such practice divides whole the world between us (the civilized) and them (the other or savage). Palestinian-America critic Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) analyzes such practices of othering. Said examines how western scholarly works, works of literature, journalistic texts, travel books religion and philological studies construct the oriental. The oriental were defined as cruel, barbaric, evils, cunning, dishonest, given to sexual promiscuity and perversion and the like. But the Westerners were defined as kind, straight forward, upright, honest and moral. Thus the colonizers contrast themselves from the invented the oriental. In short, the oriental is an invention of the West; by contrast to whom they have been able to define themselves positively and justify any acts of military or economic acts of aggression.

Particularly after the World War second, there has been a massive intellectual, moral and imaginative overhaul and deconstruction of the Western representation of the Non- Western culture and people. Hans Bertens writes that after the World War second the writers of former colonies started the project of cultural self- definition alongside the project of political self-determination. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Anita Desai and Derek Wacott

have immense contribution in this field. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe uses literature to contest Europe's disguise of colonialism as a civilizing mission (Parker et al 32). Chidi Okonkwo states that by associating Africa with an absence of order, of soul, humanity itself, colonialist discourse had rationalized colonial conquests as a consecration of cosmos out of chaos, and -thus invested the conqueror- as -Jehovah with absolute ownership rights over the creation. Such critical insights about colonial discourses have also informed the perception and analysis of literary texts.

Post Colonial Literary Criticism

As a form of literacy criticism post colonialism has become a major force in literary studies after 1990s. A vast number of publication and researches have been done in this field. Despite their many disparities in perspectives and subject matter Elleke Boehmer states:

They are all broadly concerned with experiences of exclusion, denigration and resistance under the system of colonial control. Thus the term post colonialism addresses itself to the historical, political, cultural and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter between the west and non- west dating from the sixteen countries to the present days. It considers how this encounter shaped all those who were party to it, the colonizers as well as the colonized. (340).

Thus post colonial studies include the texts that deal with the colonial domination, and its response and resistance along with the inheritance of colonialism.

Lois Tyson elucidates that as a domain of literacy studies post colonial criticism is both a subject matter and a theoretical frame work. As a subject matter post colonial criticism analyzes literature produced by culture that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to present. Some of these literatures were written by colonizers. Most of them were written and are written by colonized and formerly colonized people. As subject matter, any analysis of post colonial literary work regardless of the theoretical frame use might be called post colonial criticism. But as a theoretical framework, post colonial criticism seeks to understand the operations: political, social, cultural and psychological of the colonialist and anti colonialist ideologies. A good deal of post colonial criticism analyzes the ideological forces that on the one hand, pressed the colonized to internalize the colonizers' values and on the other hand, promoted the resistance of colonized people against their oppressor: a resistance that is as old as colonialism itself. The colonial and anti colonial ideologies can be found in operation even in independent former colonies.

Although colonizers left the land they had invaded in the hands of those they have colonized, decolonization has been confined largely to the removal of military forces and government officials. The colonizer's system of education, culture and values that has devaluated the culture, moral and even the life style of colonized people have been left behind as a form of cultural colonization. Thus, the ex- colonials were left the psychological inheritance of negative

image. So a good deal of post colonial criticism addresses the problem of cultural identity as it is represented in post colonial literature.

Tyson further elaborates the connection between colonial ideology and construction of post colonial identity which is one of the major areas of critical concern for the post colonial critics. In her opinion:

colonial ideology, often referred to as colonial discourse to mark its relationship to the language in which colonial thinking was expressed, was based on the colonizers' assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) people, the original inhabitants of the land they have invaded the colonizers believed that only their own Anglo – European culture was civilized, sophisticated or as post colonial critics put it, metropolitan. Therefore native people were defined as savage backward, undeveloped. (419)

Because of better technological advancement, the colonizer believed that their own culture was more advanced and they devalued the customs, cultures and religions of people they had conquered. They kept themselves at center and colonized were at margin. They regarded themselves as proper self have all qualities of a civilized human beings and native peoples were considered as other, different and inferior. But sometimes the savage was perceived as possessing a primitive beauty or nobility or exotic other. The uses of European culture as a standard bearer to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted is called eurocentrism. In literary studies the concept of literary text to have universal themes and characters was the product of eurocentrism. In this concept, the universality of the texts is judged whether or not they resembled those from European literature.

Tyson further writes that another example of eurocentrism is a specific form of othering called orientalism. Said's book *orientalism* (1978) analyses such practices of othering. It has been practiced in Europe and America. Under colonial mission, the West attempt to produce their positive self-image by contrasting from the colonized people and culture. For this, the West projects all the negative characteristics which they don't want to have to Eastern people. The colonized Eastern are defined as cruel, sneaky, evil, cunning, dishonest, given to sexual promiscuity and pervasive and the like. But the Westerners are defined as kind, straight forward, good, upright, honest and moral. Thus, they contrast themselves from the invented oriental. Explaining Said's concept Hans Bertens remarks:

Orientalism, then, has traditionally served two purposes. It has legitimized Western expansionism and imperialism in the eyes of Western governments and their electorates and it has also insidiously worked to convince the natives that Western culture represented universal civilization. Accepting that culture could only benefit them- it would, for

instance, elevate them from the backward or superstitious condition in which they still lived- and could make them participants in the most advanced civilization the world had ever seen (204).

The colonialist ideology which is inherently Eurocentric was inculcated to colonized people through different colonial institution and propaganda. The indigenous people have been programmed to believe the colonizers values and beliefs are superior to indigenous values and beliefs. Consequently, colonial subjects have been created.

As a literary criticism, post colonialism involves in analyzing the colonial subject and their identity in literary texts. The colonial subjects were colonized people who didn't resist colonial subjugation because they were taught the colonizers were superior. Many colonized people tried to imitate their colonizers as much as possible in dress, speech, behavior and life style. Homi K Bhabha has called such tendency as mimicry. Mimicry shows the gap between the norm of civility as presented by European enlightenment and its colonial imitation in distorted form. Bhabha notes that when English administrator dreamed of converting Indians to Christianity at end of eighteenth century, they didn't want their colonial subject to behave too Christian or too English. Their discourse foresaw a colonized mimic who would be almost the same as the colonist but not quite. However, since Indian mimicry of English blurred the boundary between the ruler and ruled. The dream of anglicizing Indians threatened to indianize Englishness; a reversal the colonist found intolerable. Thus, mimicry is a state of ambivalence that undermines the claims of imperial discourse and makes it impossible to isolate the racialized essence of either the colonized or colonizer.

Post Colonial theorists often describe colonial subjects having a double consciousness or double vision. In other words, a consciousness or way of perceive the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures, that of colonizer and that of the indigenous community. Double consciousness often produced an unstable self. The forced migration become of employment or result of enslavement etc has heightened the sense of unstable self. A large number of people have been reminded in the diasporas now days. They have been caught up with the feelings of belongings to nowhere. They don't feel to be belonged to themselves neither in their home country, nor in the country of their present living. Such situation doesn't only create physiological uncertainty but also the sense of cultural displacement. Bhabha refers such feeling as unhomeliness. Being unhomed doesn't mean homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in our home.

The pre-colonial culture of colonized people influenced European culture also. For example Picasso's art was greatly influenced by his study of African masks. Therefore many post colonial critics argued that the post colonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving

hybrid of native and colonial cultures. Hybridity doesn't consist of statement between two warring cultures but rather a productive, exciting and positive force in a shirking World.

Formally colonized people need to rediscover their pre-colonial for various reasons. First of all, they have to falsify the claims of colonist the pre-colonist societies didn't have any culture. The native people lived barbarically without any system of government or religion. Secondly, they have to create the national image in their own eyes and in the eyes others. The emphasis of indigenous culture accompanied by the attempt of eliminating Western influences in called nationalism. Moreover, the females of post colonial worlds have been suffered from double oppressions. They have been victim of colonialist ideology which devalues them become of their cultural ancestry and patriarchal ideology, which devalues them becomes of their sex. Precisely, the subjectivities of colonial subjects: double consciousness, mimicry, unhomeliness, and hybridity, and the quest of rediscovering national identity and double marginalization of females dominate the critical discourse of post colonial literature.

Tyson sums up that the post colonial critics interpret literature in terms of following common topics:

1. The native peoples' initial encounter with the colonizer and the disruption of indigenous culture
 2. The journey of the European outsider through an unfamiliar wilderness a native guide
 3. Othering (the colonizers' treatment of members of the indigenous culture as less than fully human) and colonial oppression in all its form.
 4. Mimicry (the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behaviour, speech, and lifestyle of the colonizers)
 - 5, Exile (the experience of being an "outsider" in one's own land or a foreign wanderer in Britain)
 6. Post independence exuberance followed by disillusionment
 7. The struggle for individual and collective culture identity and the related themes of alienation unhomeliness (feeling that one has no cultural "home", or sense of cultural belonging), double consciousness (feeling torn between the social and psychological demands of two antagonistic cultures), and hybridity (experiencing one's cultural identity as a hybrid of two or more cultural, which feeling is sometimes described as a positive alternative to unhomeliness)
 8. The need for continuity with pre-colonial past and self definition of the political future.
- (427)

These features of post colonial criticism have their connection with the historical expansion and exploitation of colonialism. Along with, economic exploitation, the colonial domination also shapes human perceptions and subjectivities.

Conclusion

Post colonial criticism is influenced by the historical constitution of colonial expansion. It tries to deconstruct the ideology and practices of colonialist practices as they are reflected in books produced by both colonizer and colonized. The strategies of colonial expansion, initial encounter of colonizer and colonized, the suppression and domination of colonizer in native land, the struggle of resistance of native individually or collectively, and the euphoria of independence and the disillusion followed it are some concerns of post-colonial criticism. Besides, the cultural interaction of colonizer and colonized and its effect on human condition such as mimicry, ambivalence, unhomeliness, etc are also explored by post colonial criticism.

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