



Colonialism vs Post colonialism : A Critical Study

Ms. Madhushree

Associate Professor of English,
Dept of English,
Govt. Homescience College for Women
Holenarasipura, Hassan Dist.

Abstract:

‘Colonization’ is generally mistaken as a political process, perhaps, because of the etymological associations with the word ‘colony’. The word ‘colony’ in English, was borrowed from Latin and used in the sixteenth century to mean ‘farm, settlement, landed estate, etc.’ The word acquired the derivational form ‘colonized’ during the seventeenth century and with the European colonies all over the world, expanded into ‘colonized’, ‘colonial’, ‘colonist’, ‘colonization’. Of late, it is used in other forms like ‘postcolonial’, ‘neocolonial’, decolonialising, anticolonialism etc.

Key Words: vortex, etymological, neocolonialism, polyvalency, multiverse.

Theorisation of literary studies has borrowed its terms and concepts largely from other disciplines- linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, Marxism etc. In the process, literary criticism has been drawn into the vortex of theory. In the last thirty years literary criticism and theory have moved closer to each other.

Foucault’s influence on Edward Said, in a way, paves way for one kind of Postcolonial criticism. The influence of Feminist criticism, Post structuralist approaches, and the focus on ‘power dynamics’ inaugurated what might in rigorous way be called Postcolonial criticism in the 1990s.

‘Colonisation’ is generally mistaken as a political process, perhaps, because of the etymological associations with the word ‘colony’. The word ‘colony’ in English, was borrowed from Latin and used in the sixteenth century to mean ‘farm, settlement, landed estate, etc.’ The word acquired the derivational form ‘colonised’ during the seventeenth century and with the European colonies all over the world, expanded into ‘colonised’, ‘colonial’, ‘colonist’, ‘colonisation’. Of late, it is used in other forms like



‘postcolonial’, ‘neocolonial’, decolonialising, anticolonialism etc.

All this does not mean that there was no colonization or colonists before the word was used in English or Latin. “Colonialism” is very much a part of the power-dynamics operating in any human situation. The dictionaries, even today, define ‘colonialism’ as a ‘practice’ by which a powerful country controls less powerful countries and uses their resources in order to further its own interests, wealth and power; but the word ‘colonialism’ in the last decade or so, has assumed several other senses, representing new notions that are dormant in the power structure. It is not just political power alone that constitutes power and is used for domination and exploitation. There are several versions of colonialism called neocolonialism, economic colonialism, cultural colonialism, linguistic colonialism etc. The word ‘post colonialism’ implies after-colonialism. But colonialism, hegemony, and domination never end and they are as old as human existence. Power politics and exploitation are innate human tendencies and to represent the different manifestations of the power dynamics, it is better to use the word ‘neocolonialism’ to talk about what is meant by ‘postcolonialism’. Language and literature have always been used by colonizers as a powerful tool in the process of colonization, be it political or cultural. It is very obvious that whatever knowledge, wisdom, science, technology, literary criticism and modernization that is projected as universal is actually Eurocentric. It again is essentially based on white, Eurocentric norms and practices. The critical questioning and rejection of this notion of universalism marks the beginning of postcolonial criticism.

Frantz Fanon in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* pointed out the need for reclaiming one’s own past and erasing the debunking of the past by the colonizers as part of the ‘cultural resistance’ in France’s African empire. Postcolonial theory and criticism must aim at ‘seeing’ the postcolonial era by shedding the ‘amnesia’ that set in during the colonial period. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* enlarged the scope of postcolonial approach by exposing the Eurocentric universalism that establishes Western superiority over the east, identified as the ‘other’. The orient, a colony, according to Said, features in the western mind as a sort of surrogate and underground self.

Hybridity and cultural polyvalency is characteristic of our contemporary life in general and everyone celebrates not only fluidity but also anarchy. This kind of outlook gives postcolonial criticism and theory a broader vision. Feminist criticism with its focus on patriarchal power structures, Marxist criticism with its socio-economic orientation, discourse oriented studies of Foucault, Bakhtin and others, deconstructive notions of the fluid and unstable nature of any form of identity-all contributed to the rapid growth of the colonial criticism and theory. Decolonising the mind, changing the mindset and moving towards a mind shift are some of the terms that have given a new turn to studies in the area of colonialism and imperialism. Thus, Postcolonialism is an emancipatory concept for the oppressed minds. The oppression could be political, economic, social, gender, race, class etc. It does not introduce a new world free from colonial ills; it rather suggests continuity and change.

Foregrounding differences and diversity, celebrating hybridity, plurality and ‘otherness’ as potential sources of vitality and change, and rejecting notions like standardization, conformity universalisation that are seen as sources of power, hegemony and colonialism-these notions are



gaining ground in critical thinking. The focus now is not on 'universalism' that projects only the Western/Eurocentric values enshrined in their literatures but on other cultures and their literatures and ethnic differences and diversity. This, in turn, will expose the hidden agenda of colonialism and imperialism and bring to the forefront the suppressed local culture and their traditions - be it written or oral. The 'otherness' of cultures as it is called shows the richness of a multiverse that has been treated as the Eurocentric universe. This kind of work has been taken up not only in the field of literature and literary criticism but also in other areas like medicine, administration, management etc. The search for alternative systems is on.

Peter Barry identifies three phases of postcolonial criticism. The first phase is the adopt phase in which the writers and critics follow the European form and norms to describe their experience. The second phase is the adapt phase in which they suitably modify the form and norms to their own specifications. During the third stage, called the adept phase, the colonial mind becomes independent, creative and really 'cross-cultural' expressing its experience.

Works Cited:

- Abrahams, Cecil. "The South African Writer in a Changed Society." Matatu. 2.3-4
- (1988): 32-43.
- Arnold, Milliard. "Introduction." Black Consciousness in South Africa. New York:
- Vintage Books, 1979. xiii-xxxvi.