

THE EMERGENCE OF POSTCOLONIALISM: A HISTORICAL ASPECT

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of postcolonialism traces its history back to the time period of colonialism. Postcolonialism is a resultant concept of colonialism and other political and social concepts. This research paper aims to study the emergence of postcolonialism as a new avenue of literary criticism. The concept of colonialism is discussed in detail in relation to imperialism, neocolonialism and eventually postcolonialism. The importance of postcolonialism as a tool in literary criticism is also focussed upon in this paper.

KEYWORDS: Colonialism, Imperialism, Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism

The most common implication of the term 'postcolonial' is to a time period after the end of colonialism. Postcolonial literature is usually referred to the literature of nations like Canada Australia, Nigeria, New Zealand, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Jamaica, Ireland etc. The postcolonial literature of all these countries is not similar to each other. These countries have their own disparities. And, also the term postcolonialism cannot be understood without mentioning other critical approaches such as Post-Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism, Linguistics etc. Postcolonialism is an umbrella term which covers a variety of terms and concepts under it. It is very difficult to give one precise definition of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism can be understood in connection with capitalism and imperialism.

Colonialism has manifold implications. Colonialism in general witnesses violence. The violence of colonialism may be cultural, political, and economic. Postcolonial literature basically addresses the ways in which the non-European literature of the countries of Asian, African and South American continents has been marginalized as a result of colonization. And also this literature seeks to understand the possibility of retrieval and reversal of their 'own' pre colonial pasts. Postcolonial literature can be observed as a literature of anger, protest, resistance, and also of hope. In order to understand the themes of postcolonial literature, we must first take up what colonialism meant and what it achieved.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the term 'colony' is derived from the fourteenth century Latin term 'colonye' which means 'colon-us', meaning cultivators, planters, farmers or settlers in a new country. But this fourteenth century meaning of 'colony' is very much different from the later version of the term. In the fourteenth century this term was used for the Roman settlers. At that time it basically referred to the 'farm' and 'landed estate'. It was used for the Roman citizens who used to live in a newly conquered hostile country. These citizens retained their Roman citizenship and only acted as a garrison. But the later version of *Oxford English Dictionary* described the term 'colonial', as belonging to or relating to a colony specifically the British colony; or the thirteen British colonies which became the United States or to the time while they were still colonies. Thus, initially the colonies were not the agency of governance over the native races of colonies but only meant new settlement by communities seeking a better life. These settlements approximately up to the fifteenth century involved the mixing of the two races i.e. the settler and the native race. In the centuries to come the settlers retained their originality (European) rather than assimilating into the native culture or race. While living outside

Europe, they considered England or Europe as their only home and thus considering the native race as different from themselves. In certain cases, the native race was also destroyed by the colonizers. At this point enters the true impact and image of colonialism i.e. violence. Violence, as an aspect of colonialism gets attention from postcolonial literature and theory also.

Colonialism is now defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak people by a large power'. Thus, colonization in the twentieth century cannot be considered as an innocent 'settlement' in a new place. It has acquired the status of a violent mode of exploitation of the native race and culture in terms of its knowledge, political systems and technological advancement. In short, the non-European cultures and knowledge were destroyed, altered or 'controlled' by the European colonial rulers. The conquest of the colonizers over the native countries was not political, it was also a sabotage of their culture and epistemology. In order to control the culture and forms of knowledge of the native race, the colonizers acquired the knowledge of the native culture through translations, academic study and through commentaries. A good example of the cultural dimension of colonialism is the rule of the English in India. The colonial administrators like T. B. Macaulay, scholars like William Jones and James Mill, first studied the Indian culture and languages like Sanskrit through translations of Indian texts into English. They got to know about Indian art, religion and law system. Afterwards, they declared that the Indian texts and culture were irrelevant, primitive, immature and completely pristine. They argued that with such outdated culture India could never progress. Thus, the question arose that how could India progress? They answered to this question by submitting the fact that the only solution to the problem of progress of India was the substitution of English as the language of knowledge and instruction. They presented English language and the European culture as the only assurance of liberty, development, equality and above all 'modernization'. It seemed only the English meant modern and the non-English as uncivilized. And hence, English as a language of education was imposed on India by T. B. Macaulay.

The nineteenth century was the heyday of European empires. This was the time period when theories were formulated in the disciplines of medicine, science, anthropology, and other disciplines. These theories set parameters of comparison between the European and non-European races. They formulated theories, set parameters, and acting as judges themselves announced that the non-European races occupied the lower end of the scale of human development. The native races were deemed to be irrational, irrelevant, immature, effeminate, primitive, criminal and unreliable. The European colonizers created such situations in which they justified their governance and presence in the colonial continents by stating that since the native people were not able to take care of themselves so they must be taken care of by the European. Thus, colonialism had some basic features of the economic, political and military governance of the non-European lands by the European rulers. The transformation of native societies happened in the field of religion, education and also in bureaucracy.

Colonialism is often perceived as imperialism and imperialism is used as synonym of colonialism. Colonialism and imperialism are similar in a way as both involve the rule by a European nation over a non-European one. But the line of difference lies in the fact that colonialism involves the governance by setting into the non-European land whereas imperialism is basically governance through 'remote control', without actual settlement in the non-European spaces. Before the nineteenth century the term imperialism was used for political expansion of state power. In the latter part of nineteenth century it meant a system of economic domination and expansion of the financial superiority. The political and military aspects were also included along with the economic factor. V. J. Lenin in his classic text *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of*

Capitalism (1916) looks at colonial processes rooted in the rise of western capitalism. The key difference between colonialism and imperialism can be stated as colonialism is the governance through random settlement while imperialism is a deliberate ideology driven control.

Temporally, the term 'postcolonial' is described as the time period after the political independence of the colonies. Through the process of 'decolonization', the non-European nations have made themselves postcolonial. One important fact to be observed is that although the non-European nations have acquired political independence yet are still economically controlled by the European power. That is why we have the term 'postcolonial' and not 'post imperial', because the once colonized nations have become politically free from the clutches of colonizers but economically and mentally they are still the slaves of the European power. This kind of control is called as 'neocolonialism'. The term neocolonialism is generally used in reference to Euro-American control over the economy of the world. Neocolonialism is the result of nexus of the Euro- American powers with the politicians, the generals, the CEOs, and the bankers. There is no explicit involvement of military in neocolonialism but implicitly military power is used to threaten the Asian/African nations. Therefore, neocolonialism is much more dangerous and insidious for the 'Third World'.

By the mid twentieth century many of the Asian and African nations had got independence. In temporal terms they were 'postcolonial' which means 'after the colonial'. The 'postcolonial' specifies 'a transformed historical situation, and the cultural formations that have arisen in response to the changed political circumstances in the former colonial power' (Barnes 10). The term 'postcolonial' meant framing new policies for the economic, political and social development of the nations. Newer cultures were developed and promoted but the impact and influence of the European colonial power could not be totally undermined. The Asian and African postcolonial states were received by the world in accordance with the new economic policies for the 'Third World'. The change in the visa rules for the 'Third World' people after 9/11 attacks, can also be seen in the light of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism is closely linked with decolonization. Post-colonialism involves many strategies of negotiation, resistance and assertion of culture for countries like India, to deal with neocolonialism and the controlling of the 'Third World' countries by the 'First World' nations. The practice of postcolonialism includes the reconstruction of the native cultures and folkloric forms, and rewriting of histories with newer forms of narrative. Helen Gilbert defines 'postcolonial' as:

The term indicates a degree of agency, or at least programme of resistance, against cultural domination; in others, it signals the existence of a particular historical legacy and/or a chronological stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation-state; in yet others, it is used more disapprovingly to suggest a form of co-option into Western cultural economies . . . 'postcolonial' has become a convenient . . . term to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race and gender oppression. (Gilbert 1)

Thus, the contribution of postcolonialism in today's literary scenario cannot be undermined. It has not only emerged as a distinct literary field but also has attained a canonical status.

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