



Review Paper

Postcolonialism: Edward Said & Gayatri Spivak

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Abstract

Postcolonialism is a term largely used to refer to all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the time of Colonization to our own time. Postcolonialism means ongoing issues and debates between East and West since the colonial process started. It attempts to examine and analyse the aftermath of colonization ; that of restoring the identity of the Independent oriental nations by removing misconceptions about the orientals. It includes literature of the nations such as – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Jamaica and more countries which were once colonized by British. These countries are also called Third World Countries. Marxism and Poststructuralism have been a major influence on the thinkers from Fanon to Gayatri Spivak. Postcolonialism tries to decenter/deconstruct the Eurocentrism or Eurocentric beliefs.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Orientalism, Subaltern, Hegemony, Power, Discourse, Identity, Race., Colonizer/colonized, White/black, Europe/Third world countries.

Introduction

This paper will focus towards Edward Said's concept 'Orientalism' and Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'subaltern'. Drawing my interest in Said, Foucault, and Gramsci this paper examine how the western texts have represented the East , the Orient or the Subaltern characters. The texts referred in this paper are informed by my reading of them in postgraduate courses and reflect my area of interest. Thus the selected texts should not be treated as paradigmatic of postcolonialism or orientalism. The texts referred in this paper are: The Tempest by William Shakespeare Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe ,The Outsider by Albert Camus, Heart of the Darkness by Joseph Conrad, A passage to India by E.M. Foster. All the above texts have been analyzed in the light of theories of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak as well as postcolonialism. Basically Postcolonialism involves the following points: Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' & Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'Subaltern'. Analyzing texts produced by the writers who belong to the countries which were once colonized by British¹. Reading texts produced by those who have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism². Rereading the texts produced during colonialism in the light of theories of colonial discourse.

EDWARD SAID: Orientalism

"Knowledge is not innocent it is always operated by power" this Foucauldian notion informs Edward Said's book *Orientalism*(1978)³. Orientalism is a term applied to 'the orient' as discovered, observed and described, in a sense, 'invented' by Europe and the West. In literary context it refers to the

discourse by the West about the East, in all fields, such as, literary, sociological, and so on, which have no counter point in the east. This discourse aggregates to a "textual universe". It refers to the attitudes of the west towards the east; to the occident looking in/on/at the east and, explains and interprets it⁴.

Origin: In the Middle Ages the east became of increasing interest to the west-it was remote, inaccessible and exotic. Most of the speculation of such study gained importance because of travelers' tales and stories. For instance, Marco Polo (c.1254-1324) is the prime example of an author who began to introduce the east to the west with his immensely popular book of travels, which was translated into many European languages. Sir John Mandeville, the supposed author of famous travel book also found in many European languages. The increasing Islamic empire threatened Christianity and led to the crusades, thus bringing east nearer to west. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 was virtually the end of Christianity. The expansion of Ottoman Empire threatened the west even more. The west became fearful of this matter of urgent military necessity. The travelers' accounts began to proliferate. Vasco-da-gama discovered India, provided material for the west to write about the east and fantasize about it. 'Arabian Night's' Entertainment' or '*The One Thousand and One Nights*' by Antoine Galland appeared in 1704 and 1717. Adventurous travelers went far beyond the prescribed itineraries or boundaries of the Tour. By 18th century, Sir William Jones considered as earliest British orientalist who translated many works from Arabic and Persian which influenced the oriental themes of romantic poets. Napoleon had interest in preserving the knowledge about the east. He funded

for such study of the oriental people. Europeans created and recreated the east as they wanted it to be. The east is always represented as mysterious, wonderful, and perhaps immoral. In this way orientalism as a discourse and oriental studies multiplies yearly.

Orientalism examines the vast tradition of western "construction" of the Orient. It has been a "corporate institution" to discuss, describe and write about orient by authorizing views about orient and ruling over it⁵. Said's book is considered to be one of the influential books of the late 20th century. He points out that the knowledge about the 'orient' produced and circulated in Europe was an ideological accompaniment of colonial power. He refers a range of writers, statesmen, political thinkers, philologists and philosophers who contributed to orientalism as an 'institution'-a lens through which the 'orient' would be viewed and controlled. Said argues that representations of the 'orient' contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its 'other'. It maintained and extended European hegemony over other lands. Orientalism refers to the sum of the western representations of the orient.

Said's critique is influenced by Foucault's work to make connections between the production of knowledge and the exercise of power. It allows us to see how institutions which regulate our daily lives. His basic argument is that orientalism or the study of the orient was ultimately a political vision of reality, whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the familiar (Europe) and the strange (orient).

Said speaks of certain shapes and structures about the orient such as, orientalism constructs binary oppositions between the orient and the Occident, where the orient is everything that the occident is not. Orientalism is a western fantasy. The views of the west about the orient are not based on the facts that exist in oriental lands, but often results from the west's dreams, fantasies about the orient. Orientalism creates a fabricated construct. It serves as an institution where opinions views and theories about the orient circulate as objective knowledge Said claims that orient became an object suitable for study in academic. Orientalism influences many of literary writings coming to the service of orientalism. Orientalism studied something called Islam without studying the people as it is a desert religion. Orientalism functions to justify the superiority of western colonial rule over eastern lands. In order to emphasize the connection between imaginative assumption of orientalism and its material effects. Said also shows how certain stereotypes about east and the orient are expressed in orientalism. The west is considered as a place of scientific progress and development, while the orient was deemed remote, unchanging, primitive or backward. The orient is strange, fantastic, bizarre, while occident was rational, sensible and familiar. Orientalism makes assumptions about race. Racism is product of orientalism. They represent Arabs murderers and violent, the lazy Indian and the inscrutable Chinamen. Orientalism represents gendered stereo types. They consider

east as a whole as effeminate or the sexually promiscuous, exotic oriental female. Oriental man is insufficiently manly. The oriental women are often depicted nude, as an object of sexual desire. Orientalism reveals the orient as a site of perverse desire on the part of male colonizers. The Oriental characters are always shown as coward, lazy, uncivilized, etc while the west usually presented us culturally sound and civilized.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Subaltern

She is one of the influential critic who is related to Postcolonialism, Feminism, Deconstruction and Marxism. She was a follower of Derrida and his translator. She is the author of translator's preface of Derrida's "Of Grammatology". She is interested in seeing how truth is constructed rather than in exposing error. Fundamental to Spivak's theory is the concept of Subaltern. The 'Subaltern' is a military term which means 'of lower rank'. She borrowed this term from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" shows the earliest political historiography shifted the voice of the subaltern groups (women, tribal people, Third world, orient)⁶.

She is known for her best known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", she realizes herself sometimes as Third-world woman, as a marginal awkward special guest, as a American Professor, as a Bengali middle-class exile and sometimes as a success story in the star system of American academic life. She has been taken for granted in the positioning of the subject as a Third World subject⁷. In this essay she exposes the irony that the subalterns have awakened to a consciousness of their own rights by making practical utterances against unjust domination and inequality. She denounces the harm done to Women/Third World women and non-Europeans. She wants to give voice to the subalterns who can not speak or who are silent. She focuses on speculations made on widow sacrifice. She attempts to restore the presence of the women writers who have been submerged by their male peers. She investigates of Women's Double-Colonization (Dalit/Black women)⁸.

She attacks the Eurocentric attitudes of the West. She holds that knowledge is never innocent, it is always operated by western economical interest and power. For Spivak knowledge is like any other commodity or product that is exported from the west to the Third world. The western scholars have always presented themselves and their knowledge about the Eastern cultures as objective. The knowledge about the third world is always constructed with the political and economical interest of the west.

Spivak criticizes Foucault other critics accusing them in cooperating with capitalism and imperialism. Spivak joins Edward Said in order to criticize the way in which western writers have represented the third world (subaltern) in their academic discourse. For example, Caliban in Shakespeare's The Tempest, Arabs in Albert Camus' The Outsider and so on.

Spivak's concept of Worlding : Spivak rejects the idea that there is a precolonial past that we can recover. A nostalgia of lost origin, roots, and native culture is flawed project because there is no 'pure' precolonial past to recover ; it has been changed by colonialism. What we can do is only understand the "worlding" of the "Third World". Worlding is a process through which the local population was 'persuaded' to accept the European version of reality for understanding their social world⁷.

Some Literary Illustrations

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*(1611)⁹, Caliban is depicted as subaltern and secondary, to Prospero who represents the west/colonizer who is a learned person appears to be manager controlling natural and unnatural forces of the Island. Prospero can be identified as stereotypical figure of colonial authority and domination. Caliban accepts Prospero's supremacy. Prospero exploits the natives of the New World. Caliban is represented as primitive, devoid of Knowledge and any written language Prospero seeks to civilized natives as a part of his reformist venture. Myth about Cannibals of Caribbean. Caliban's name is like Cannibal also similar to Cariban- name used for the natives of the West Indies. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* shows how Richard Burton without being a pilgrim to Mecca or Medina could write about Islamic history and about their people.

In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)¹⁰ the hero Robinson becomes a prototype of British colonialist and Friday the symbol of subject races. Robinson is represented as Hercules with a muscular body while Friday a Negro and a cannibal as physically less strong than Crusoe. The oriental women encountered by Crusoe are also shown as starkly nude. Robinson imposes upon Friday his language, religion and God. He teaches Friday to call him Master. In this text Friday is submissive, uncivilized and uncouth. The cannibals from the place of Friday are shown when they are feasting on other cannibal by killing them. But in reality cannibals eat their own kind, but only after the death, they do not kill and eat.

In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899)¹¹ there is a description of a oriental woman by Marlowe. In the novel Conrad devotes a passage describing the nude oriental woman encountered by Marlowe. It is typically stereotypical representation of oriental women by a western writer. This how and what Said wants to in focus about the representations of the natives by the western writers.

In Albert Camus's *The Outsider* (1942)¹² the Arabs are represented as murderers who are killed by Meursault (French-Algerian). None of the Arabs are named in this novel like Friday. Mr. Raymond's girl friend's brother and his Arab friends are represented as Murderers.

In E.M.Foster's *A Passage to India*¹³ also there are such stereotypes. For example, in a trip to Marabar caves Mrs. Adela Quested charges on Aziz that he wanted to rape her even if he had done nothing like that. Actually west assume that Indians are rapists, this is how things are ideologically brought up in many of the western texts. Again Mrs. Moore after coming to India speaks that Indians need civilization which the west can give them and is considered as superior than the east¹⁴. In a recent Hollywood movie Iron Man – Arabs/Russians are represented as murderers. Tony Stark is a English hero who is kidnapped by Arabs.

Conclusion

Postcolonialism critically examines the relationship between the colonizers and colonized, from the earliest days of exploration and colonization. Drawing on Foucault's notion of 'discourse', Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony', Derrida's 'deconstruction' postcolonialism focuses on the role of texts, literary and otherwise in the colonial enterprise. It examines how these texts constructs the colonizers (Masculine) as superior and colonized (effeminate) as inferior. To be fair Said has responded positively to some of the criticism made on him. In recent years he has looked more closely at resistance to Orientalism , covered in his book '*Orientalism Reconsidered*' and '*Culture and Imperialism*'. However, it would be unfair to conclude that just because Said does not venture into the latter territory he necessarily suggests that the colonialist discourse is all pervasive. Foucault's own work suggests that domination and resistance are inextricably linked. Foucault himself has been criticized by Gayatri Spivak for not paying attention to colonial expansion as a feature of European civil society or how colonialism may have affected the power/knowledge system of the modern European state. Hence to put it in a nut shell we cannot disregard Said's contribution to literary studies. He opened the way to various critics, such as, Spivak and Bhabha to explore their theories. His book *Orientalism* served as a monument to the postcolonial studies.

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