

Postcoloniality in *No Longer at Ease*, *A Passage to India*, *The Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract:

Postcolonial studies is a wide discipline with many theories and elements. In this paper, I investigated some key elements of the postcolonialism and applied them on first three chapters of three novels, No Longer at Ease, A Passage to India, The Heart of Darkness. The elements of post colonialism were to be digged out from the texts mentioned above and then comparisons were made among the texts. The attempt was to read postcolonial literature in order to analyze the elements woven into the texture of the literature. All the texts were read contrapuntally and then the elements were sorted out for the analysis. The way the writers of the postcolonial literature fabricated the themes of postcolonialism in their respective texts, has been the basis of this paper and their distinct treatment towards the postcoloniality. The treatment of the elements in post colonialism in their texts was quite different from one another because the effects of colonialism vary in intensity and nature in different colonies. No doubt, some of the elements of post colonialism are similar in these texts with a different treatment of the writer. Elements of postcolonialism for the analysis would be ambivalence, alterity or otherness.

Key words: Postcolonialism, ambivalence, alterity or otherness

Introduction

Postcolonialism is the study of European imperialism and the after effects of colonial and neo-colonial power. Postcolonial

analysis explores the nature and impact of inherited power relation and continuing effects on modern global culture and politics. Nation-state relations, race, class, economics and gender are made clearer when we consider them in the context of their relation with the colonial past. It is just because of the structures of power established by colonizing process pervasive, though often hidden in cultural relation through the world. Postcolonial studies have divided conceptual vocabularies that are themselves sites of negotiation and progressive refinement. Language itself has played a leading role in colonization. Words those were “Ordinary” take a new meaning and concepts from a number of disciplines (anthropology, literature, history, government).

Postcolonialism deals with the effects of colonization in cultures and societies; however, from the late 1970 the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization. It is the study and analysis of European territorial conquest, the various institutions of European colonization, the discursive operation of empire, the subtleties of subject and resistance of those subjects, pre and post independent nations and communities. Historical, political, sociological and economic analysis of such communities and nations has traces and impact of European imperialism. The word “post” bears the meaning of after colonialism is a understanding of working of post colonial culture which stresses the articulation between and across the politically define historical periods of pre colonial, colonial and post independent cultures. According to Aijaz Ahmed, ‘it is a Tran historical thing always present and always in process in dissolution in part of the world or another’ (1995:9).

Some of the elements of the postcolonialism in the assignment are ambivalence, alterity or otherness and diaspora. The simple definitions to these terms are;

Ambivalence

A term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action (Young1995:161). Adapted into the theory of Homi K Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer.¹

Alterity or otherness

Alterity is derived from the Latin *alteris*, meaning ‘the state of being other or different; diversity, otherness’. Its English derivatives are alternate, alternative, alteration and alter ego. The term *alterite* is more common in French and has the antonym *identite*.² The term was adopted by the philosophers as an alternative to ‘otherness’ to register a change in the Western perceptions of relationship between consciousness and the world. In the postcolonial theory, the term has often been used interchangeably with otherness and difference. The self-identity of the colonizing subject, indeed the identity of imperial culture, is inextricable from the alterity of colonized other, an altering determined, according to Spivak, by a process of othering. Alterity is an arena for superpowers where the difference in skin color, geography, sex, and other historical and biological markers of difference are socio-politically discoursed.

Diaspora

From the Greek meaning ‘to disperse’, Diasporas, the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands in to new regions, is a central historical fact of colonization. It is the traditional notion of exile/Diaspora indicates a certain dislocation from the normal or ‘natural’ place of living or way of life. The dislocating force may be direct and coercive or diffused

¹ Bhaba 1984a,1985; Young 1995.

² Johnson and Smith 1990.

and subtle, such as a lack of opportunities for the social or economic advancements.³ Diaspora is an important area of postcolonial studies, as colonialism resulted in a voluntary or a forced movement of the colonizers and the colonized alike.

Literature review

Postcolonial criticism emerged as a distinct category only in 1990`s. it has gained currency through the influence of such books as: *In Other Worlds* (Gayatri Spivak,1987), *The Empire Writes Back*(Bill Ashcroft ,1989), *Nation and Narration* (Homi Bhabha,1990) and *Culture and Imperialism* (Edward Said,1993). An important collection of relevant essays is *Race, Writing and difference*, 1986, reprinted from two issues of general critical inquiry and edited by Henry Louis Gates, one of the best known American figures in this field. The ancestry of post colonialism can be traced to Frantz Fanon's " *The Wretched of Earth*" published in French in 1961 voicing what might be called 'Cultural resistance' to France, African empire. Fanon argued that the first step for colonized people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. The second step is to begin to erode the colonist's ideology by which the past had been devalued.

Edward Said *Orientalism* 1978 is said to inaugurate post colonialism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western, and the inferiority of what is not. Said identified a European cultural tradition of Orientalism, which is a particular and long standing way of identifying the east as 'Other' and inferior to the west. He says, the orient features in western mind "As a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (*Literature in the Modern World*, Dennis Walder, p-236).

³ *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* by Emmanuel S.Nelson, Advisory Editor.

At the same time and paradoxically the east is seen as fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive. The people there to be seen as masses rather than individual, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury etc) rather than conscious choices or decisions.

Post colonialism writers trace the pre colonial version of their own nation rejecting the modern which is tainted with the colonial status of their country. An awareness of representation of the known European as immoral 'Other'.

Discussion

Postcolonial studies equip us with so many elements that are to be traced in the texture of a work. *The Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* are among the many other novels that project colonial and postcolonial writings. A few of the elements of post colonialism are traced and contrasted.

The relationship between the colonizers and the colonized is the relation that is much marginalized. The authority on one side and the submission on the other. Both the writers, E. M. Forster and Conrad have the similarity of description in the relationship of the colonizers and the colonized. Text of both the novel demonstrates the authoritative attitude of the colonizers with that of the colonized. In *A Passage to India*, the gap between the colonizers and the colonized is much evident in the attitude of the British families with the Indians on the whole with little exception. The event when Mrs. Lesley with another lady jumped into the Tonga, she says,

“O tonga-wallah, Club, Club. Why doesn't the fool go?”

Tonga wallah waits for the fare which is to be paid by Dr. Aziz, he is not a Fool who is unable to comprehend the English ladies. This shows the hatred and the repulsive attitude of the colonizers and their relationship with the marginalized. There is another evidence of marginality in the novel when an

Indian gentleman had driven up to an official's house and being turned back by the servants and told to approach more suitably and only one case among thousands of visits to hundreds of officials, but its fame spread wide. The account of humiliation of the native is an event of Fame for the others. Even in the Chandrapore Club,

“Indians are not allowed into the Chandrapore Club even as guests”

The British even don't accept the Indians to attend their parties and dinners as guests. The element of Alterity or the state of being other or different is present. The gap between the colonizers and the colonized cannot be bridged to remove the differences between the colonizers and the colonized and their respective roles, one being as authority and the other as submissive.

The Indian visitors are directed to stay in the veranda if they ever visit the English people. Aziz says,

“The veranda is good enough for the Indian”.

Alterity is the main element in the postcolonial literature as it refers to the racial hatred of the colonizers with the colonized. In 'No Longer at Ease', the similar treatment of otherness or Alterity is shown in the description of the Africans by Mr. Green. He says,

“The African is corrupt through and through”

“They are all corrupt. I am all for equality and all that. I for one would hate to live in South Africa”.

The comment that 'They all are corrupt' is made to generalize all the Africans by a white man. Obi's case cannot be generalized in the same fashion that all the Africans are corrupt. Such is response of the superior race for the inferior one. The way Mr. Green orders in the bar is another proof of his sense of otherness when he refers to his colleague as master.

‘One beer for this master’ (p-03)

The masters are the colonised and the others are the marginalised. They treat them as others and liable to bow before them.

The submissive attitude of the colonized is also evident in the text of the novel. Dr. Aziz hastens when he receives the message of civil surgeon, but when he reaches there, he is humiliated because Old Callendar leaves the place saying “Damn Aziz”. At such a response, Dr. Aziz writes a note, “Dear Sir, At your express command I have hastened as a subordinate should”, and then he stops, tears the note of protest and leaves. Dr. Aziz is not just a subordinate, but he is also one of the colonized that ought to obey and show extreme respect to the colonizers.

In *The Heart of Darkness*, Conrad also traces the link of the authoritative attitude towards the colonized. The event of bargain between Fresleven and Blackman selling ‘black’ hens and the reaction by Fresleven clearly portrays the attitude of the colonizers with the colonized. Fresleven went to the village and “started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick” (p13), even if the fraud is not proved on the part of the Blackman. Conrad, in spite of advocating the poor Blackman, titles Fresleven as “gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs”. The act of beating the Blackman is rationalized saying that he “felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect....therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly” (p-11)

The colonizers desperately hate the colonized and judge them by the colour of their skin. They hate the African colonized just because they are black.

“They had faces like grotesque masks” (p-20)

The description of the Africans by the writer goes like that

“This scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants”

The comparison made by the writer shows his tendency of colonialism in his texture. The treatment of the colonized is further depicted in the novel as,

“...each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking” (p-22)

The Africans are treated like animals and they do obey them and serve them in the best possible way. They suffer the cruelty of the colonizers and they are dying terribly,

“They were dying slowly.....they were not enemies, they were not criminals” (p-24)

“They were nothing earthly” (p-24)

They were “nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation” (p-24)

Even after death, they are treated inhumanly,

“I saw ...the body of a middle-aged negro with a bullet-hole in the forehead” (p-29)

Among the turmoil of savages, the presence of a white man is a figure of elegance.

“And these figures of elegance are among the dusty niggers with splay” (p-26)

The same account of the Africans is portrayed in ‘No Longer at Ease’ by Chinua Achebe. Mr. Green says in the bar,

“The fact that over the countless centuries the Africans has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease”.

The white men’s burden is evident in civilizing Obi. Mr. Green comments,

“We have brought him western education. But what use is it to him? He is....” (p-03)

The African were thought to be downtrodden and inferior. The description of the natives in Africa is given in these words,

“They are very proud of its past. (Africa) when it was the terror of their neighbour, before the white men came and levelled everyone down”. (p-04) The levelling down is the white

men's burden to civilize the natives who are uncultured and savages. The system of education of the savages was made possible by the mission schools in the distinct areas. Obi was one the students who were able to get equipped with the education patronized by the colonizers. A description is given in the first chapter that Obi passed the 'Cambridge School Certificate' with distinction in all the eight subjects. Even the primary education was made possible for Obi in a 'Mission school'.

Even the way of life of the colonized African is somehow made inferior,

"Where men and women toiled from year to year to wrest a meagre living from an unwilling and exhausted soil". (p-10)

Ambivalence is another element of the post colonialism and there are many traces of ambivalence in *A Passage to India*. The account of taking bribe is reprimanded but when bribe is accepted by the English, they admire them.

"The English take and do nothing, I admire them".

The same account of accepting bribe is present in *No Longer at Ease* also. The President of the Umuofia Progressive Union says,

"It was a thing for a shame for a man in the senior service to go to prison for twenty pounds.....if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and a juicy one".(p-05) The same ambivalent idea is presented by another man who adds,

"It is all lack of experience....he should not have accepted the money himself. What others do is tell you to go and hand it to their houseboy". (p-05)

It is ambivalence to fluctuate between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. Again Aziz joins in and says,

"Why talk about English? Brrrrr.....! Queen Victoria and Mrs Banister were the only exceptions, and they are dead".

They are talking about the English but at the same time they do not approve of talking about them. Aziz lifts his hat out

of respect when two ladies come out of Old Callendar's house. He doesn't respect them at heart but he demonstrates respect at their encounter. He disapproves of an English woman when she enters a mosque. He says, "you have no right here at all.....you should have taken off your shoes". He scolds her for being in the mosque but at the same time he declares the rule for entering the mosque that is without her shoes.

The first chapter of the novel is the description of the landscape. Even the landscape mentioned by the novelist somehow has the traces of the postcolonial elements. The surrounding of the colonized is described in its grim details. Forster writes that Except for the Marabar Caves- and they are twenty miles off the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary and the river Ganges is scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. In spite of the unattractive surroundings, the British settlements are glorified, sensibly planned, the bungalows are disposed along the roads and intersect at right angles and it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky.

"They separate themselves from the population, declaring their own superiority over the masses as they build their walled compounds content to be out of sight and sound of any Indians, with the exception of their servants (of course) (Kareena 44)"

On the other hand, the city accommodates the colonized in a different fashion where "houses do fall, people are drowned and kept rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low or indestructible form of life."

Forster writes, "The houses the Eurasians stand on a high ground". The high ground is symbolic of the high status as well as their relation with the colonized and treatment with the natives.

This low form of life seems to be liable to the colonizers with the liability to imbibe civil behaviour as well. This act of

civilizing the low form is white men's burden, which they think they ought to do. Such an ideology of superiority fuels up the authoritative attitude in the colonizers and they expect the other from the colonized.

The title 'Heart of Darkness' demonstrates the harsh and brutal attitude with the colonized. It depicts the superiority of the whites over blacks. Being "Black", they are referred to as savages, barbarians and cannibals. The place where they dwell is the place referred to by Conrad as the Heart of Darkness, a place of dark people with darkness prevailed. It is the place devoid of civilized people where the colonizers have to go to culture them, or civilize them in their own fashion, "White man's burden". The novel opens with the line showing supreme authority over the blacks by the whites.

"Swung to her anchor without a flutter of sails" (p-5)

They start an expedition without having least hesitation in their attitudes for conquering the world of savages and brutes. The colonizers are in this respect,

"The bearers of a spark from the sacred fire"

They have a Heavenly mission to civilize the colonized.

"I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you"

The same attitude of civilizing the uncultured natives and to strike the balance is also present in the character of Ronny in *A Passage to India*. He is the character that exemplifies the ruling class of the nineteenth century British colonizers. He fulfils the characteristics of the administrative class. He adopts the aloof and chilly manner that was characteristic, caring only about his superiority over the Indians and his evenings at the club with his own kind (Kurinan 43). He shows his callousness and robotic adherence to his role as magistrate in India in an argument with his mother.

'We're out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them's my sentiments. India isn't a drawing room.' (Whitemen's burden)

The term civilization here serves as an umbrella term that conceals the brutality of the colonizers in their ill treatment towards the colonized. Moreover, this ideology of civilizing provides the colonizers a rational ground for every act of brutality and savagery which they think is liable without any regrets or pricks of conscience. They break away with the laws of humanity and tend to achieve their goals by materializing the inhuman activities and barbarianism.

Conclusion

All the three novels contribute to the study of postcolonial literature. All of them share some commonalities of postcolonial literature but with a slight difference. *A Passage to India* shows the elements of ambivalence, Alterity and the traces of white men's burden. The same elements are in the make up of *No Longer at Ease* by Chinua Achebe where the gap between the white and the blacks is much more evident in such elements. In *The Heart of Darkness*, the elements are present in the same fashion where Darkness is associated with the blacks who are savages and brutes. We can easily find out the hidden links of the post colonialism in these texts; however certain differences are also there according to the genre and the ideology of the writer. Forster seems to condemn the colonizers but the treatment of the colonizers by Conrad is quite different. Achebe portrays the hatred of the colonizers towards the colonized but at the same time, he also brings out the tendency of errors and mistakes of the natives in this regard. He makes the natives the victim of error and follies and ultimately facing the harsh consequences. All the authors contribute their works to the postcolonial literature in a distinct manner with diversity.

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