

If the origin of postcolonial aesthetics lies in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and its theory in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the critical assessment of it dates back to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's epoch making book, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). While making an analysis of postcolonial theory, it is imperative on my part to explain the term postcolonial and the significance attached to it in the present context. Like the term 'post-modernity,' 'post-coloniality' emphasizes a contemporary state and is currently in fashion with the literary critics. It at once operates at two levels—first, as a historical marker of the period following decolonization and second, as an embodiment of intellectual approaches which have been influenced by post-structuralism and post-deconstruction. And what is more, in the late 1980s and early 1990s the term postcolonial has been used to replace the earlier terms like 'Third World' or 'Commonwealth Literature.' The term Commonwealth Literature fell into rough weather in the hands of writers from the erstwhile British colonies, when it was drawn upon them that the writers of the colonizer (*i.e.*, England) do not form a part of this body of Literature. Hence, a new term, post-colonial literature is coined to suggest decentring of colonial literature. Two books, *The Empire Writes Back* (1987) by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin and *The Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literature in English* (1994) ed. by Benson and Connolly proved to be the last nail in the coffin of Commonwealth Literature and popularized the term post-colonial literature.

The time and locale of 'Post-Colonial' are open to debate. One is reminded of Ella Shohat's question, "when exactly [...] does the post-colonial begin?" (1992: 103). In this context, equally interesting is Arif Dirlik's answer: "When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe" (1997: 294). Edward Said's book, *Orientalism* (1978) is said to represent the first phase of post-colonial theory. Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha—all diasporic intellectuals, have popularized postcolonial theory.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* seeks to study the post-colonial texts in the former colonies in the context of European imperialism. He has defined Orientalism as "a Western Style for dominating, restructuring, having authority over the Orient." Gayatri Spivak almost corroborates this view in her book, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* in the following words:

Post-coloniality—the heritage of imperialism in the rest of the globe—is a deconstructive case. Those of us from formerly colonised countries are able to communicate with each other and with the metropolis, to exchange and to establish sociality and transnationality, because we have had access to the culture of imperialism. Shall we then assign to that culture, in the words of the ethical Philosopher Bernard Williams, a measure of 'moral luck?' I think there can be no question that the answer is 'no.' This impossible 'no' to a structure which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and everyday here and now of 'postcoloniality' is a case of it. Further, the political claims that are most urgent in decolonised space are tacitly recognised as coded within the legacy of imperialism, nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, socialism, even culturalism. They are thus being reclaimed, indeed claimed as concept metaphors for which no historically adequate referent may be advanced from postcolonial space (1993: 60).

Homi Bhabha's work demonstrates the ambivalent attitude of the colonisers between hatred and longing for the natives, which needs to be challenged. Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) and his earlier edited book, *Nation and Narration*

(1990) are landmarks in the field of postcolonial theory. The themes of 'hybridity,' 'ambivalence' and 'contingency' are supported by almost all the postcolonial theorists.

If Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak emphasize culture and imperialism as the distinguished factors that influence post-colonial literature, Fredric Jameson speaks of allegorical nature of this literature and underlines the history of the erstwhile British colonies (now free independent countries). Moreover, Jameson speaks of in terms of the binary opposition of the First and Third Worlds, which has been questioned by Aijaz Ahmad. In his essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" Jameson says that "all third world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical and in a very specific way, they are to be read as what I will call national allegories [...]" (1986: 69). Aijaz Ahmad questions Jameson by saying that the latter's concept of National Allegory would be 'positivist reductionism' (1994: 97).

Frantz Fanon talks of the psychological aspects of colonialism and myths of racism in his well-known books like *Black Skin and White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The importance attached to the critique of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha has resulted in the dissemination of post-colonial theory. As I have stated in the beginning of this essay, the book, *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin and *The Encyclopaedia of Postcolonial Literatures in English* (1994) edited by Benson and Connolly have popularized the term post-colonial and lent respectability to post-colonial literature. In *The Empire Writes Back*, the authors seek to broaden the scope of the term 'post-colonial' in the following words:

[...] the literature of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its postcolonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the

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metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literature everywhere. What each of these literatures has in common is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (1989: 2).

Ella Shohat goes a step ahead to say that post-colonial can be a universalizing category. In her essay "Notes on the post-colonial" she writes:

Since most of the world is now living after the period of colonialism, the 'post-colonial' can easily become a universalizing category which neutralizes significant geopolitical differences between France and Algeria, Britain and Iraq, or the U.S. and Brazil since they are all living in a 'post-colonial epoch.' This inadvertent effacement of perspectives, I should add, results in a curious ambiguity in scholarly work. While colonial discourse refers to the discourse produced by colonizers in both the colony and the motherland and, at times, to its contemporary discursive manifestations in literature and mass-mediated culture, 'post-colonial discourse' does not refer to colonialist discourse after the end of colonialism. Rather, it evokes the contemporary theoretical writings, placed in both the First and Third Worlds generally on the left, and which attempt to transcend the (presumed) binarisms of Third Worldist militancy (Mongia, 1997: 324-25).

In course of an article, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," Aijaz Ahmad, a post-colonial theorist has rightly drawn our attention to the lack of certainty about the exact date of the use of the term 'post-colonial' in the following words:

As the terms 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonialism' resurfaced during the 1980s, this time in literary and cultural theories and in deconstructive forms of history-writing, and as these

terms were then conjoined with a newly coined 'postcoloniality,' this resurfacing included no memory of how the term had come into being in the first place. In some usages, the world 'postcolonial' still attempted a periodisation, so as to refer to that which came after colonialism—though this sense of periodisation was itself used differently by different critics (Mongia, 1997: 281).

Semantically post-colonialism means something that has a concern only with the national culture after the departure of imperial power. But in actual practice, it has to be understood only in reference to colonialism. Like colonialism, post-colonialism is a state of consciousness—a crucial stage in the continuum of our cultural process and self-awareness. Colonialism involves two types of imperialism—political and cultural. Therefore, myth and history, language and landscape, self and 'the other' are all very important ingredients of post-colonialism.

Post-colonial theory claims that the major theme of literature from post-colonial countries can be taken as resistance to the former coloniser. It further assumes that the writers who write back to the centre are representing the people of their society authentically.

Post-colonial theory in using terminologies like 'the oppressed,' 'the colonized people' and 'the indigenous' to describe 'post-colonial societies' it suppresses internal hierarchies and divisions in these societies. What is disturbing is that it confers the 'Subaltern' status on the entire post-colonial world. Moreover, it states clearly that 'post-colonial writing must be in English' or in 'english' as emphasized by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*. They explain:

We distinguish into this account between the standard British English inherited from the empire and the English which the language has become in the post-colonial countries (1989: 88).

Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in a critique of the book *The Empire Writes Back* felt the need to distinguish sharply between two kinds of post-colonialism. The first is that what we call oppositional post-colonialism which is found in its most overt

form in post-independent (*i.e.*, independent?) colonies at the historical phase of post-colonialism (with a hyphen). The second form is a complicit post-colonialism [...] an always present underside within colonization itself (Trivedi, 1996: 236).

It is clear that periodisation of the term "post-colonial" will be misleading, for it could be applied to USA after its War of Independence. On the other hand this term is used in recent years for designating some kinds of literary writings and literary criticism. I am inclined to agree with Homi Bhabha when he says that "the term postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonized Third World comes to be framed in the West" (*Critical Fictions*, 1991: 63).

Coming to the 'locale' of 'post-colonial' theory and practice, I should say that it is not confined to any particular country or region. The discourse of "post-colonialism" is not about the former colonizer (Britain) or neo-colonizer (economically, USA), but about the colonized other. For the first time the non-West (*i.e.*, the colonized other) has been placed at the centre of the dominant discourse of the Western academy. For example, Indian Writings and Indian authors are widely represented in Benson and Connolly's (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Post-colonial Literatures in English* (1994) and Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman's (ed.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (1993) respectively.

Now post-colonial literature refers to literatures written in English in former colonies. It is not correct to say that the post-colonial writers (poets included) write back to the former colonizer. In fact, they write to establish their individual identity independent of their colonizer and try to show that not only they have gained independence from the latter but successfully made the colonizer's language (*i.e.*, English) a vehicle for creative expression. The result is that English literature has yielded place to literatures in English and the medium has been transformed from English to other english (or englishes). Each former colony uses English in its own way (the Queen's English is out of fashion) and that is why we get

African English, Australian English, Caribbean English, Canadian English, Indian English, etc. in the post-colonial age. Hence, it is difficult to agree with Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin when they say that "Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex indigenous practices [...] imperial language and local experience" (1995: 1). Leela Gandhi refutes their claim in the following words:

The arguments of writers like Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths fail to convince primarily on account of their refusal to address adequately the ideological wedge between histories of subjectivity and histories of subjection. There is a fundamental incommensurability between the predominantly cultural 'Subordination' of Settler culture in Australia, and the predominantly administrative and militaristic subordination of colonised culture in Africa and Asia. A theory of postcolonialism which suppresses differences like these is ultimately flawed as an ethical and political intervention into conditions of power and inequality. Equality, pious protestations of postcoloniality from one colonised nation such as India must engage with the differences between internal histories of subordination, kept in place by the continuing exclusions of postcolonial civil society (Gandhi, 1999: 170).

Postcolonial theory can be questioned on a vital point, that is, with reference to the medium of postcolonial literature. Postcolonial theorists argue that the literatures written only in English (i.e., the former colonizer's language) in the erstwhile British colonies should be termed postcolonial literature. They lose sight of the fact that in a multilingual country like India the rich regional literatures written in the postcolonial period are excluded from the domain of postcolonial literature. To say that only those writers who now write in English in India and elsewhere were subjected to colonization but not the regional writers, will be a travesty of truth. Thus, I suggest that literatures written in any language including English in the former British colonies, which seek to assert national identity, describe the rituals, culture and tradition of their respective nations should be included in the category of postcolonial

literature. Furthermore, the writings of diasporic writers (including expatriate and immigrant writers) such as Derek Walcott, Bharati Mukherjee, G.S. Sharat Chandra and others should be included in the domain of postcolonial literature.

On reading and interpreting the postcolonial theory and text, one encounters a paradoxical situation and cannot help asking "is not post-colonial still colonial?" This is because postcolonial theory makes use of structuralism and post-colonialism, though it is about the non-West, is an offshoot of post-modernism. What is still more disturbing is the attitude of the intellectuals of non-West, who still look to the West for intellectual guidance. The globalisation instead of being a two way traffic becomes a one way traffic. We, for example, in India because of our colonial heritage, accept what Gayatri Spivak calls "a belief in the normality of the other" (though it happens to be only the 'English other' for us). I concur with Shashi Deshpande when she raises a vital issue in the following lines:

But I have yet to hear that there is any writer in the West who is waiting with trepidation to hear what a critic in India has to say about her/him. I have yet to learn that an Indian critic can make or break a book that comes from the West (*The Hindu*, Sunday, January 2, 2000: XIII).

Indian intellectuals are yet to overcome the feeling that Westerners know best and that is why, they give more importance to Anglo-American critics than to Indian critics even on a subject like our indigenous Indian English literature. Post-colonial situation has given us confidence to write creative literature in English and it would be good for us to gain confidence to write literary criticism in our own way—then only, 'post-colonial' will redeem the 'colonial.'

To conclude, I should say that postcolonial theory deals with cultural contradictions, ambiguities and perhaps, ambivalences. It repudiates anti-colonial nationalist theory and implies a movement beyond a specific point in history, (*i.e.*, colonialism). Hence, postcolonial theory is transnational in dimension, multicultural in approach and a movement beyond