



Indian English Literature and Nationalism in Postcolonial Era

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Abstract

The concept of this paper is "Postcolonial writing in Indian English Literature and its impact on Nationalism". The discussion can be divided into four parts. The meaning and definition of the term "Post colonialism" comes initially. The significance of the term in the broad area of "literature" has been described. The paper highlights the origin and the development of "Post-colonial theory". Postcolonial theorists like Fanon Frantz, Edward Said and Peter Barry are also analysed. The main themes like 'Racism', 'Nationalism' and 'Ethnicism' are also discussed here. The post-colonial Indian English authors like Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai with special reference to their novels "Midnight Children" and "Cry the Peacock" respectively are discussed. Lastly, the influence created by the Postcolonial Indian English writers on the Indian readers with regard to 'Nationalism' is also discussed.

Key words: post-colonialism, literary, theory, Indian, nationalism

Postcolonialism is the critical academic study of the cultural inheritance of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. Specifically, it is a critical theory analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of (usually European) imperial power. Postcolonialism covers a wide variety of approaches, and theoreticians may not always agree on a common set of definitions. On a simple level, through anthropological study, it may seek to build a better understanding of colonial life—based on the assumption that the colonial rulers are unreliable narrators—from the point of view of the colonized people.

Zimbabwean doctor, entrepreneur and writer J. Nozipo Maraire, highlights the necessity and significance of Postcolonial Literature by saying that "Until the lion learns how to write; every story will glorify the hunter."

Postcolonial Literature emerged in the mid-twentieth century, when many colonised nations were fighting for their liberation from the colonisers. Thus, Postcolonialism involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects. The literature describes any kind of resistance against class, race and gender oppression.

The Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffins enlist the purpose of the term "Postcolonial" as,to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by the European imperial aggression.

Postcolonial writers have different views on the selection of language in Postcolonial writings. Few writers stress the use of language of their nation

in their works. These writers strongly believe that their traditions, age old customs and manners can be expressed in the best way in their native language. One of the best Post colonialist writers from Kenya Ngugi wa Thiong'o, successfully started writing in the English language but then he ceased to write in English and started writing in *Gikuyu*, a language spoken primarily by the Kikuyu people of Kenya. He argued that after the end of colonialism, it was imperative that a university in Africa teach African literature, including oral literature, and that such should be done with the realization of the richness of African languages.

Some writers preferred the usage of the language of the colonizers prominently English. These writers wanted to enhance the inter-nation communication, by writing in English. They aim at redirecting the tool of 'language' against the colonizers. The Postcolonial English writers employ the colonizers' language, to oppose the colonizers and to rectify the damages created by them in the historical, social, cultural and economic sects. However, they made transformation the English, so as to create a native experience.

Postcolonial writers like R K Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and Chinua Achebe are of the view that the imperial language need to be transformed in order to suit the native readers. Therefore, they employed the techniques of "appropriation" and "nativisation" of the English language. R K Narayan's attitude in the choice of expression of language is deemed quite ambivalent and complex - he is aware that English is the language of the colonist, yet he is found to have accepted it for practical reasons. That is, his attitude towards the English language appears to have resulted from and shaped by the reality prevailing in the postcolonial setting.

In his foreword to *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao writes as,

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought – movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien'; yet English is

not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make up- like Sanskrit or Persian was before- but not of our emotional make up. The Postcolonial writings are replete with regional dialects and native phrases so as to suit the native readers.

Mulk Raj Anand was in London when most of his novels were published. When asked about the stark realism in his works once, he had said, "I could write in the language of the people because I lived in my mother's village."

Chinua Achebe, a renowned Postcolonial writer, in his famous essay called "The African Writer and the English Language," pointed out the difference between national language and ethnic language. He expresses his view as-

A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realized or potential audience throughout its territory. In other words, a literature that is written in the national language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation. If you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature, as I see it, is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, etc., etc.

However, modifying the imperial language so as to suit the native cultural experience is a scholastic process. An emerging writing "Postcolonialism" as a critical literary theory emerged in the mid- twentieth century. It is a literary theory or critical approach, which focuses on the literature produced by the nations which were colonized earlier. In some instances, it also deals with the literature written by the colonizing countries, which takes "colonies and their people" as the subject matter. The Australian critics. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffins, summarize the essence of "Postcolonial theory" in a nutshell as, Postcolonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe

such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is 'essentially' postcolonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field. However, Edward Said in (1978) says, "Orientalism", published in, is considered as the foundational work in Postcolonial studies. Peter Barry in his comments on Said's "Orientalism" says as, Edward Said's "Orientalism", is a specific expose of the Eurocentric Universalism, which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western, and the inferiority of what is not.

The Britishers ruled India and Indian subcontinent for more than two hundred years. During the imperial rule, the natives were subjected to atrocities and harassments in all the walks of life including the cultural and moral lives of the natives were deeply misconfigured. Accordingly, the Indian writers emerged with a view to unite Indians and to wipe out the colonial perspectives. As India is multilingual nation with a rich heritage of many regional languages, the Indian writers chose English as the medium of their writings. The literature produced by the Indian writers in English, came to be known as "Indian English Literature". The early works of the Indian English authors were set against the backdrop of the "Postcolonial" themes of 'Nationalism', 'Racism,' 'Ethnicism' and 'cultural Identity'. The writers also dealt with a variety of sub-themes such as 'rootlessness', 'alienation', 'gender discrimination', 'labour exploitation', 'hybridity', 'poverty', 'corruption' and so on.

The early exponents of Postcolonial Indian English Literature are Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and so on. The writers of the modern age are Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Kiran Nagarkar and so on. The Postcolonial Indian English Literature became a prestigious platform for the women writers too. The women writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri became popular. Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" (1981), ushered a

new trend in the Postcolonial writings through 'magical realism'.

Postcolonial Indian English Literature celebrates variety of genres. Among them, the genre of 'novel', emerged as the most successful. The Indian novel in English has had an amazing success in the Western world. One only needs to look at the Booker prize list in the last 20 years to gauge its success. Increase visibility of the Indian writer in English has led to a slew of articles and books on the subject. Rise of nationalism and the independence movement is the most prominent theme in the Indian novel. There are themes like the trauma of partition and communal violence. Some writers have focused on novels that deal with family relationships, the politics of gender, depictions of continuing caste discrimination, politics of the underworld, and the like.

The status of a perfect postcolonial text in *Midnight's Children* is known for its brilliant use of magic realism. The issue of street identity and conflict of immigration is beautifully depicted in his novels. The idea of nation has always been the central concern in his imaginary and non-imaginary writing. With magical realism, postcolonial writers are able to challenge realistic narrative and present an alternative reality. The description framework of novel consists of tale which Saleem Sinai recounts to his wife. This self-referential narrative recalls aboriginal Indian culture with similarity to Arabian Nights. In this novel, the mixing of the fantastic and ordinary, which is an aspect of magical realism, seems Indian as the characters involved in contemporary political and social turmoil also has the power of mythic heroes. The narrator Saleem constantly relates his life to that of his country India. His nativity, growth, development and destruction are related to that of India. The other characters too seem to stroll through the pages of history, colliding with necessary events in the development of India seemingly by accident.

By endowing the protagonist with magical powers, the novelist speculates on a variety of themes like 'nationalism', 'realism', 'partition', 'politics, and so on. The novelist asserts the fact that,

in the Postcolonial Indian scene, the growth and development of each and every individual is directly proportional to the wholesome development of the nation.

The women writers of the Postcolonial Indian English Literature, switched on to the microscopic themes of 'alienation', 'poverty', 'isolation' and 'disillusionment' in the familial lives of the Indian folk. Anita Desai's first novel, "Cry the Peacock" (1963), echoes the sufferings and agony of the Indian women folk. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, experiences an unhappy, hopeless marital life. Maya has been married to a middle-aged lawyer named Gautama, who devotes much of his time to his career. The astrologer's prediction about Maya's early demise, makes her anxious and uneasy. She wants to enjoy life to the fullest, with this minimal time she has in her hand. However, all her sexual advances have a cold response from her husband Gautama. In a sense of dejection, Maya is driven insane, which leads to Gautama's tragic death. Maya's sense of 'alienation' and 'rootlessness' reflects the plight of the entire Indian womenfolk.

In his book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, says as, one is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature.

In this way, the Postcolonial Indian English authors composed their works with a view to voice the sufferings of the under privileged, in order to uplift them, thereby contributing to the growth of the nation, both culturally and socially.

"Nationalism" is a sense of identification with one's own nation and to extend one's support for its interests; especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations, according to dictionary. The influential writers relieved themselves from the manacles of Imperialism, the Indians could rejoice and enjoy the fresh air of freedom and a sense of reverence towards the nation. Unfortunately, this unity was soon shaken up by the various anti-social elements, who encouraged a sense of discrimination in the

minds of the Indians in terms of race, gender, caste, colour, creed, region, language and so on. These anti-nationalist forces wanted to divide people and to obstruct the development of the country. Therefore, the Indians must be united. This unity can pave way for the nation's development. In the book, "Rise Up and Salute the Sun", Suzy Kassem, writes as, Mankind should always stay united, standing shoulder to shoulder so evil can never cheat and divide them. In this backdrop, Literature plays an significant role in the national integration. Albert Camus expresses his view about the responsibility of the writers as, ...the purpose of a writer is to protect the civilization from destroying itself. It is possible only for a writer to shape the minds of the readers, so as to lead them towards a holistic view of "Nationalism". The Postcolonial Indian writers continue to exert a dominant influence in the Indian scenario, by inculcating the values and significances of "Nationalism".

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