

Case Study



## A BRIEF STUDY ON POSTCOLONIAL WRITERS

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### ABSTRACT

Postcolonial writers wrote the text from a colonized angle to reassess the works of the colonial rule in order to develop cognizance to decolonize the perception about the East in the Western discourses. Their primary concern was to resurrect their native culture and change the language discourses to restore their national identity. The foreign rule exploited politically and economically the colonized country resources, and invaded their cultural domain to establish their superiority through hegemonic forces to consolidate their imperial empire. The paper studies the theoretical background of the postcolonial writers and their prominent perspectives to write the texts to underscore the basic features of the postcolonial theory.

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Postcolonial writers returns to colonial past to study the western narratives and questions the biased narratology of colonial discourses. Postcolonial studies the political and psychological impact of colonial rule on the colonized to examine the causes and consequences of the literary production of counter discourses in postcolonial literature. The term "discourse" was defined as, "especially in application to passages representing conversations between characters in a literary work and in the 1970s there developed a critical practice called *discourse analysis* which focuses on such conversational exchanges." (Abrams 312) The paper deliberates on the prominent postcolonial theorists and their significant contribution for the postcolonial studies particularly in the works of Fanon Franz (nation), Dipesh Chakrabarty (historiography), Gaytri Spivak's (Subaltern), Edward

Said (Orientalism) and Homi Bhabha (Hybridity) for their critical analysis of colonial-colonized conflicts of textual discourses. Postcolonial theory propounded anti-colonial discourses, promoted native culture & Meta narratives, rejected Eurocentric norms, reclaimed their places & spaces, rewrote history, addressed the conflicts over personal & national identities (Diaspora) and through language discourses decolonized (withdrawal from the colonial influences) the imposed superiority of Western culture in their literature. Petter Barry explained the characteristics of postcolonial writings in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*:

Characteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create a pre-colonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the

colonial status of their countries...an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'Other.' (Barry 187)

The postcolonial writers used language as a strategy to disempower the colonial rule, so as to empower their indigenous culture, as a result produced anti-colonial literature. The classic example of postcolonial writer was Chinua Achebe's *Things Falls Apart* and his critical essay *Colonialist Criticism* as he inspired the natives to reject colonial influences to redefine their national authority analogous to Frantz Fanon's emphasis on national consciousness. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon insists that, "it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows" (Habib 744). Similarly Salman Rushdie, a Diaspora writer was concerned with issues of national and personal identity expressed in his essay *Imaginary Homelands*, and these issues was addressed by Homi Bhabha through the concept of hybridity in his postcolonial theory. The close readings of George Orwell's *Burmese Days* and *Shooting an Elephant* elucidate the hegemonic ideas of colonial rule. Gramsci defined Hegemony as, "that a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate class unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression." (Abrams 207) Dipesh Chakrabarty explores these causes of hegemonic forces in his essay, *Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History*. Gayatri Spivak writes about the Subaltern as systematic subordination of the native and deprivation of their power and voices in her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In postcolonial studies subaltern refers as, "standard way to designate the colonial subject that has been constructed by European discourse and internalized by colonial peoples who employ this discourse." (Abrams 307) This intellectual essay was a significant contribution to postcolonial and feminist studies. Leela Gandhi evidently explains the postcolonial reception of Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak* in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*:

The complex notion of subalternity is pertinent to any academic enterprise which concerns itself with historically determined relationships of dominance and subordination. Yet it is postcolonial studies which has responded with the greatest enthusiasm to Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Utterly unanswerable, half-serious and half-parodic, this question circulates around the self-conscious scene of postcolonial texts, theory, conferences and conversations. (Gandhi 2)

Postcolonial theory interprets the text to infer colonial impact on the language discourses, though colonizer knew the importance of the language as it denotes identity to the people and the nation. Even though colonizers attacked their (colonized) identity as a result postcolonial writer retaliated in reciprocal antagonism in producing anti-colonial discourses. Postcolonial theorists critically studied the modes and approaches to analyze the text and they all viewed in different theoretical framework. These different perspectives proposed by eminent theorists will be analyzed in the light of their contribution in introducing major postcolonial concepts of orientalism, hybridity, subaltern, Eurocentric norms and nationhood to interpret the textual discourses of post colonialism.

To begin with Fanon Franz, he deduces the postcolonial literature as a psychological struggle for national awareness for national consciousness to fight for national identity. Here national awareness means the nation and the culture are integral part of nationality hence one resides in the other, he says this in his book: *The Wretched of the Earth*, "For Europe, for ourselves, for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man." (Habib 744) As Fanon Franz dealt with the psychological effects of colonial rule on the people of the nation and his emphasis to reiterate that end of colonial rule is not an end of its impact but total liberation from colonized mindset would be the real end of colonialism. However, Dipesh Chakrabarty addressed altogether different nationality in terms of artifice of history in other words he

expressed his displeasure for historians who wrote history based on Eurocentric (European's world view) models instead of writing common man's real history. According to Fanon psychological presence of colonial impact still witnessed in postcolonial nation. The precise comprehension of Fanon's psychological notion of nation, it becomes easier to understand Dipesh Chakrabarty's criticism of historiography (the way history is written). His concern was for intellectual historians, though gained independence still psychologically not independent to write authentic history. He argues, "Non-Western thought is consistently precluded from the constitution of knowledge proper." (Gandhi 44) This misrepresentation was analyzed differently by Edward Said in his seminal text, *Orientalism*. Said was deeply disturbed with the falsification of the East by academicians and intellectuals in Western discourses so he relentlessly exposed the biased colonial knowledge and colonial power that undermines the indigenous culture of the Orient. The concept of *Orientalism* was well explained by Leela Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*:

It proposes that 'Orientalism' – or the project of teaching, writing about, and researching the Orient...Accordingly, it claims that the peculiarly 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Gandhi 67)

Edward Said raised concerns in *Orientalism* (the study of Orient) about the epistemological distinction that propagates in Western discourses between East (Orient) and West (Occident) in binary oppositions to define Europe in Postcolonial studies. He was more bothered in relation to the knowledge creation of the West through which Orient is created, misrepresented, critiqued, and positioned in language discourses. He understood Orient and Occident are invented in the Western discourses for political domination in the power relations and also to change the power relations between East and West in order to establish (Western) cultural superiority in language discourses. Said refers to the problems with the issue of misrepresentation but Homi Bhabha identified the

origin of problem that aroused due to interpolation between colonizer and colonized from the same location, and this source of conflict was identified and elaborately discussed in Homi Bhabha's *Hybridity*, an irrefutable consequence of Colonialism.

The notion of "hybridity" is central to Bhabha's work in challenging notions of identity, culture, and nation as coherent and unified entities that exhibit a linear historical development. Hybridity expresses a state of "in betweenness" as in a person who stands between two cultures. (Habib 750)

The colonial rule was established and expanded by colonial power and colonial authority through imposition of colonial language for colonial representation on colonized nations thus creating space for cultural politics and cultural writing. Bhabha says hybridity internalizes these ambiguities and accepts this new identity – where an individual belongs at once to more than one place. Hybridity is the product of cultural and social interaction between colonizers and colonized that highlights the intrusion of dual forces in the formation of the identities (Diaspora). This crisis of identity was the flux for postcolonial theorists as they analyzed ramifications of this new identity though through different perspectives but each point of view significantly contributes to postcolonial studies.

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