

THE RELEVANCE OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES TODAY

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to establish the importance and relevance of pursuing Post colonial studies in today's India- a nation state that has, on the surface, at least, gained independence politically, democratically. It covers aspects of post colonialism and neocolonialism that not only control and manipulate our politics, but the ideas and structures of society, gender, history, education, and through these, our identity, as an Indian and as an individual.

KEYWORDS: India, Post colonial studies, Relevance, Education, Society, Identity, Literature, English, Neo Colonial

INTRODUCTION

We, as Indians have come far from being a prominent British colony. We gained independence 68 years ago and have left behind the immediate effects of our political decolonization far behind. In some ways thus, we are post-postcolonial. Then what is the need of the propagation of a discipline such as Postcolonial Studies in nations like India today? This paper tries to address this very question from a wide angle perspective and in few different contexts.

Are the divisions and exploitations taking place in our present society on the basis of caste, color, religion, class, race, region and gender not 'colonization' in a changed apparel? Are these practices not reminiscent of colonial and even pre- colonial times? Can postcolonial studies help in recognizing and removing this new mask donned by colonialism and the tools it employed? Are foreign factors not only influencing or inspiring, but also operating many of our socio-economic systems? Would it be called 'progress' to let such factors have a paternalistic hold over our ideologies, beliefs and practices? Does decolonization mean going back to the previous state of being before colonization (renouncing '*paschimi sabhyata*') or does it mean creating and balancing a new, global, amalgamated identity for self and society? Once colonized, now politically independent societies like India, Pakistan, almost all of Africa, the US etc. cannot skirt the importance of Postcolonial studies, which help address these and many more questions that remain very much relevant to them even, and specially today.

Colonization was a multi faceted monster that operated on multiple layers. This is why decolonization and simultaneously post colonial studies need to tackle it from a "trans- disciplinary perspective." An article published on the website of the Frankfurt Research Center for Postcolonial Studies at Goethe University explains, "Postcolonial Studies aims to explore the legacies and consequences of European colonialism in its various aspects – literal, figurative, spatial, historical, political and economic. In so doing, the specific focus is never placed on particular countries, regions or even disciplines, but rather the aim is to bring to the forefront past and current interdependences and entanglements in a trans-disciplinary perspective. That which is often referred to as 'modern Europe' is read as an outcome of colonial interaction, even as (former) colonies are understood as 'laboratories of modernity'."

This discourse primarily helps the reconstruction, deconstruction and evolution of the ‘colored’ identity of the ex-subjects of colonization- individuals and the nation both. The colonization process is controversially said to have ‘effeminized’ these subjects by making them desire plus demand protection, security, guidance and parenting. This internalized dependence continues over to their seemingly independent state, setting the stage for the outplaying of neo-colonization, advertently or inadvertently. Shankar Raman states that “Following and going beyond Said (Edward Said), much important work has shown how the ways we think about national, racial and gendered identities persistently reveal patterns of misrepresentations and inequity traceable to early modern colonial pasts.” (2011)

It becomes extremely essential then to keep questioning and problematizing the convoluted and constructed thought processes involved in estimating ‘identity’ as these may further influence what identity a nation gives to itself, along with the process of governing and making policies for the development of that identity.

The distortion of the recording and telling of history and facts had played an important part in the colonization process and continues to effect present reality in post- postcolonial times too. This calls for the decoding and rediscovering of history for a better understanding of today. In her book *Masks of Conquest* (1990), Gauri Vishwanathan sets an example for the same and aims to prove how the degradation of the Sanskrit and Arabic languages in India was brought about by diverting funds from institutions teaching these languages to those teaching only English, thus refuting the statements made by the British who said that it was due to the corrupting influence of these languages and the decadent morality they apparently represented.

Another tool invariably used to tamper with the roots and growth of any mind, institution or nation has long been Education. In the postcolonial India, academicians have been constantly questioning and examining the consequences and legacies (cultural, ideological, and psychological) of the way English studies were introduced, developed and are currently functional in Indian institutions. Postcolonial theories of scholars like Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Gauri Vishwanathan, Homi K. Bhabha, etc. have been instrumental in understanding the English gears that put in motion biased and manipulative academic policies in the colonies and the native hands that are still operating them.

The proof of the persisting power of an education system deeply colonized is abundant in India- from school children being fined for speaking in any other language than English, to English primers, nursery rhymes, fairytales, etc. taking hold of and shaping the cultural imagination of natives right from childhood, alienating them from their indigenous identity. Other examples are the growing notions of supremacy of English literature over regional literature, and the subconscious disregard for the Indian scholars, academicians, authors in comparison to the work of those who are foreign, in Policy building or development practices.

The stronghold of these colonial roots in academics is even more caustic in the current times for students like us when more than 70% of the syllabus of the premier assessment of a scholar’s ability to become a college and university level teacher of English Literature in India (the UGC NET exam) still revolves around the literature produced in Britain.

Studying postcolonial theory is thus invaluable as it keeps irritating the well set belief that progress is moving towards and mimicking the west, specially Europe- the ‘center of the Earth.’

The coming together of Postcolonial studies with Gender studies has created a discourse of ‘Postcolonial feminism’ which has been detrimental in understanding the gender politics at play across the world. First world feminists

in their theories had proposed universality of women, their issues and aims, but many third world feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Naila Kabeer, Uma Narayan rebuked these, claiming that their Eurocentric perspective undermined and failed at understanding the urgent mindset and problems of the Third world women with respect to class and caste marginalization.

The Postcolonial studies also become indispensable in assessing the similar trajectories of colonization being traced around us in the political world today. Colonization is not an occurrence of the past that ended with Somaliland gaining its complete independence from Great Britain's rule in 1991. Colonization has shifted shapes and spaces, but it is still very much in practice today.

The hypocrisy of the 'civilized man' civilizing the barbaric native through all possible acts of violence and extortion persists throughout the history of colonization. It is the knowledge, analyzing and problematising of this fact, through and in postcolonial studies that points fingers at practices similar to that of the US who claims that the 150 air strikes it conducted in Iraq in August 2014 have "helped save the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children." It has also, apparently, been fighting the world's cause by supporting and funding Israel's military atrocities against Palestine which has seen mass murders accounting to genocide in the past few months. Barack Obama, US president in his statement issued on 10 September 2014 insists that the nations "endless blessings bestow an enduring burden. But as Americans, we welcome our responsibility to lead. From Europe to Asia, from the far reaches of Africa to war-torn capitals of the Middle East, we stand for freedom, for justice, for dignity." Western imperialism has clearly renovated the concept of the 'white man's burden'.

Neo- colonization is a deadly disease that is corrupting the already unstable structures of newly independent political states. Almost the entire African continent has fallen prey to this disease with debts, political instability, extreme poverty, widespread corruption, etc. scarring its infant political identity and pride on a regular basis. Closer home, the Indian society is replete with examples of neo- colonization frameworks at work too. Indian markets and economy are being voraciously manipulated by Western and also largely Eastern forces (China).

Thus while decoding methods of complete decolonization, we should also keep vigilance over new 'species' of colonization sprouting in all different shapes and sizes all around us. The scrutinizing of such and many discourses with the lens of postcolonial theory also demands a more global approach, rather than that constricted within borders.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, postcolonial studies need to evolve and expand, simultaneously narrowing its focus down to the minutest shapes and strategies colonization adopts in the contemporary times. The relevance of post colonial studies today is not only to be cautious of colonization or neo- colonization, but to understand the politics behind its objectives and operations, to assimilate tools of resistance to counter it, and to assess the damage and benefit (if any) enforced by the colonizer on a society's identity, academic policy, culture, philosophy, literature, economy, law, and governance amongst other aspects, for the overall optimal benefit of the people.

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