



LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Modernity - A Foundational Structure to Post Colonialism

Ms. K. Gayathri Menon

Researcher, Department of Studies in English, Kannur University, Thrissur,
Kerala, India.

Abstract

Imperialism is a word with a long history. It was first associated with the Romans thousands of years ago. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* mentions the fact that Europeans are now following those imperialist ways that the ancient Romans once did to these European nations. Colonialism can be considered as a practice, while imperialism is the idea driving it to practice. Modernity and its ideals changed the visage of the Western society. Rationalistic thinking, the development of science, technology and transportation facilities and an urge to conquer the world led the West to tread over non-western countries and thereby established their colonial domination. This paper analyses the different ways in which modernity laid the base for post-colonialism to thrive.

Keywords

Modernity; Colonialism; Feminism; Marxism; Globalization; Post-Colonialism.

With the spread of colonialism, modern ideas and education were also disseminated throughout the world. Thus, typical western notions started entering the world of indigenous notions resulting in a meaningful cross fertilisation of ideas. Paradoxically, this was used as an instrument by the colonised people in their struggle against Western hegemony and oppression.

Modernity is for the society, thinkers say, but the problems have grown into millions. What is wrong with the foundational theories? This question always lingers whenever one thinks of the scenario of modernity and the condition of the colonised countries before, during and after colonisation. One must digest the words of Herbert Spenser that a theory is murdered by facts. Any theory, whatever may be its quality, is not constant. It always changes. Theory of Modernity supports reason, empiricism, science, universalism, progress, individualism, toleration, freedom, uniformity of human nature and secularism. But, in truth, it creates universal oppression and an iron cage of bureaucratic rationality, which will lead to the freedom of a few.

There is commodification of all and it is due to the increasing role of capitalism in shaping our life. All the forces of change gave emergence to new values of capitalism and development which are beneficial to the West. Colonialism, which appeared in South Asia, created new markets which gave the values of capitalism, so called democracy and a general awakening. All this combined together set to motion the process of modernisation. S.L. Doshi's inclusion of the view of Anthony Giddens on modernity states that modernity is characterized by capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and political power. For him, Capitalism is an exploitive system of commodity, production and circulation. Industrialism refers expressly to the transformation of nature and use of inanimate sources of power. By surveillance, Giddens means supervision of "subject populations in the political sphere". And lastly, political power includes the manipulation of power by certain groups. Thus, the outcome of

modernity leads to capitalism where power and resources concentrate on certain spheres leaving the other marginalised sections wailing in the mud.

Globalisation, an offshoot of capitalism, is multi-dimensional and does not have a totalising character. For example, the paradigm of India's globalisation is entirely different from that of Europe. Today's ill-balanced scale of global business always favour the European and, of course, American elites by making them richer and richer day by day. On the other, the rest of the world is degraded to the condition of William Blake's "Dark Satanic Mills".

The consequences of the conflict between modernity as introduced by the Westerners and the traditional values of a colonised can be better revealed by the following incident stated by Padini. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, international community witnessed a popular drama regarding the burial of a Kenyan lawyer, S.M. Otieno. The dispute was for Otieno's body between his Luo tribe, who stood for a traditional burial, and his wife and children who wanted to give him a funeral based on the Western rites. This case of rub between tribal tradition and western values created a drift in the African psyche. Kenya was at a crucial cultural transition between traditionalism and modernity. This was not only the case of Kenya but of all the colonised countries. The peoples of different groups, races and ethnicities are chained by a dilemma about where to place themselves. This confusion or chaos in choosing the root or the stem is portrayed skillfully in the writings of the Nigerian fiction writer, Chinua Achebe. He has succeeded in presenting the experiences of Igbo community under the colonial rule. *Things Fall Apart*, the very first work and the Magnum opus of Achebe, depicts the life and culture of Igbo people, the entry of colonial power and the subsequent withering away of their culture, people and land. "He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the warlike men of Umofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women" (173).

Marxist thinkers underline 'Capitalist Modernity' as the main cause for the origin of post-colonialism. The emergence of market society in Europe and the concomitant globalisation of capital lead to the exploitation of the third world. But, according to the Marxist theorists, especially Aijaz Ahmed, there exists a theoretical and political incompatibility between Marxist and post-colonialist positions. Leela Gandhi mentions this incompatibility as the outcome of a postcolonial bias, when she says "Postcolonial analysis, in turn, rarely acknowledges a genealogical debt to its Marxist predecessors" (24).

Biodun Jeyifo deals with the 'civilising process' in Europe and the 'civilising mission' in the colonies by saying that both are linked: one prepares the ground for the other and vice versa. In the early modern Europe, we can notice the beginning of civilising of manners, conduct and personality. This comprehensive process traverses through every facet of subjectivity and identity. It ranges from the minutest details of daily life and physical experiences. In other words, it deals with the small process of management of body extending to a bigger process like formation of states. If the discourse of the civilizing process is analysed, one can find that it pertains to certain groups, nationalities and races in Europe. This shows that nearly all of the stereotypes and phobic extensions had been formulated and bred in Europe's autotelic civilizing process. These were later applied to the natives in the colonies. This, in turn, is applied to the natives of all regions and races.

Feminist and postcolonial theories have always followed what Bill Ashcroft calls "a path of convergent evolution" (Gandhi 83). Both these studies were concerned with the study and defense of 'the other'. Now these two parallel theories have come together for a very volatile and tenuous partnership. The most significant collision, the collusion of postcolonial and feminist studies occurs around the combative figure of the third-world woman (83). Some of the feminist postcolonial theorists have studied the third-world woman as twice colonised by the imperial ruling class of the West and the

patriarchal society of their native country. Black feminist movement was against this kind of two level exploitation of black woman. The above idea could be identified by placing it along with Leela Gandhi's statement that "some feminist postcolonial theorists have cogently argued that a blinkered focus on racial politics inevitably elides the double colonization of women under imperial conditions" (83).

Atto Quayson refers to a letter written by C.L.R. James to Constance Webb in 1944. A part of this letter which goes on like this "with the increasing opportunities that modern production gives to women, a new type of woman arises. She is called a career woman" (12) points his reference point on American woman but the condition described is relevant to women everywhere. This is about the peculiar condition of women taking their rightful place in modernity but having, simultaneously, to renounce 'normality' or can be viewed as the rightful citizens whilst becoming alienated subjects. This situation gets aggravated in the third world, where woman's existence is strung between traditionalism and modernity. This makes it extremely difficult for them to attain personal freedom without severe sacrifices and compromises.

It is referred that most of the colonized countries shared almost the same history of cultural colonialism, including western educational, political and religious institutions along with economic relationships and systems. The one major consequences of imperialism has been an enormous flowering of literatures by postcolonial authors that were suppressed under western hegemony. These writings used the western language to portray their experiences under colonialism and its consequences. Here, George Lamming comments that "Prospero had given Caliban Language, and with it an unstated history of consequences and unknown history of future intentions" (109).

The postcolonial literatures and postcolonial studies have gained the attention of more and more readers and scholars throughout the world. Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy

from India, Derek Walcott from the Caribbean, Seamus Heaney from Ireland, Peter Carey and Patrick White from Australia are only some of the great writers who have stamped their identity in history of not only postcolonial, but also of the whole tradition of world literature. The term 'postcolonial' is more often used to refer to the consequences of colonialism from the time the area was first colonized. The academics and writers whose origins were in Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent and Palestine became intellectual leaders. They drew on the thinking of influential European intellectuals such as the philosopher Theodor Adorno, Helene Cixous, Jacques Derrida and Jean Paul Sartre, the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan and the sociologist, Michel Foucault.

Major names that come to our mind while analysing the origin of Postcolonial studies include Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952 was a psychological analysis of racism and its effects. It analyses the effect of 'colonial gaze': European appearance and culture. It is assumed to be the norm by which others are judged, making all others 'abnormal' and either exotic or inferior. The stereotyped images that the Europeans assign over other races are diagnosed. Fanon writes "there is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men... Black men want to prove to white men at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. How do we extricate ourselves? (10). Fanon believed that settlers and colonial governments could be uprooted only by violence. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon continues his psychological study of the colonised, but also describes the psychology of the colonisers.

Edward Said concentrated more on the portrayals of Asia. *Orientalism* is Said's most acclaimed work which unveils the way in which knowledge is owned and governed by Europeans to reinforce power and to dismiss the knowledge which natives might claim to have. He claims that the European culture gained its strength from the Orient. He contends that "without

examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient” (3). The consequences of all the colonial experiences and encounters have been unsettling for the third world countries in all kinds of ways. The incursion of Europe disrupted traditional societies all over the colonies. The traditional pre-colonial culture and way of life continue to exist as a reality.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1958. Print.

Doshi S.L. *Modernity, Postmodernity and Neo-Sociological Theories*. New Delhi: OUP, 1998. Print.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1967. Print.

Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: OUP, 1998. Print.

Lemming, George. *The Pleasure of Exile*. London: Michael Joseph, 1960. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.

MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Menon, Gayathri K. “Modernity - A Foundational Structure to Post Colonialism.” *Literary Quest* 1.9 (2015): 165-171. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.