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**POST-COLONIAL THEORY**

Lois Tyson (2006), in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Manual*, holds that as a domain within literary studies, postcolonial theory is both a subject matter and a theoretical framework. As a subject matter, postcolonial theory analyses literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to the present. Any analysis of a postcolonial literary work, regardless of the theoretical framework used, might be called postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial criticism focuses on the literature of cultures that developed in response to British colonial domination. However, as a theoretical framework, postcolonial criticism seeks to understand the operations—politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically—of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies. For example, a good deal of postcolonial criticism analyses the ideological forces that, on the one hand, pressed the colonised to internalise the colonisers’ values and, on the other hand, promoted the resistance of colonised peoples against their oppressors, a resistance that is as old as colonialism itself.

Postcolonial criticism is a term which has obviously become globalised. However, a key problem remains in the actual naming. The prefix ‘post’ raises questions similar to those arising from its attachment to the term ‘modernism’. Does ‘post’ signal a break into a phase and consciousness of newly constructed independence and autonomy ‘beyond’ and ‘after’ colonialism, or does it imply a continuation and intensification of the system, better understood as neo-colonialism? According to Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker (2005):

The appearance of postcolonial theory has overlapped with the debates on postmodernism, though it brings, too, an awareness of power relations between Western and ‘Third World’ cultures which the more playful and parodic, or aestheticising postmodernism has neglected or been slow to develop. From a postcolonial perspective, Western values and traditions of thought and literature, including versions of postmodernism, are guilty of a repressive ethnocentrism.

In this unit, our aim is to explain the concept of Post colonialism as well as its theoretical predilections.

**THE EMERGENCE OF POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM**

Post colonialism as a literary theory emerged in the late 19th century and thrived throughout the 20th century. Post colonialism is a literary approach that gives a kind of psychological relief to the people (the colonised) for whom it was born. The focus of the postcolonial critic is to expose the mechanism and the evil effect(s) of that monster called colonialism on the colonised. Colonialism which is the capitalistic and exploitative method by a ‘superior’ nation (coloniser) to lord itself over a less-privileged nation (colonised) leads to the impoverishment of the latter. The concept of colonialism has political, economic, and cultural implications.

Post colonialism sees literature as an avenue to probe into the history of society by recreating its past experience with the mind of forestalling the repetition of history. The ultimate for the postcolonial critic is to develop a kind of nostalgia about his historical moment that produces a new dawn in his society. Post colonialism is a dominant feature in African and Caribbean literature as writers in these settings see colonialism as an instrument aimed at reducing them to nonentities. An interesting feature of postcolonial theory is its attempt, not only to expose the oddities of colonialism but to reveal and discuss what the independent nations make of themselves even after the demise of colonialism. In another sense, postcolonial denotes a period of recovery after colonialism as well as a signification of its ongoing cultural aftermath. Postcolonial African novelists, for example, use their novels to facilitate the transgression of boundaries and subversion of hegemonic rigidities previously mapped out in precursor literary canonical texts about African and her people.

In *The Empire Writes Back*: *Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (1989), Bill Ashcroft *et al* aver that postcolonial criticism covers “…all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present.

Thus, viewed from the perspective of a counter-discourse, postcolonial literatures become veritable weapons used to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power, based on binary oppositions such as ‘Us’ and ‘Them’; ‘First world’ and ‘Third world’; ‘White’ and ‘Black’; ‘Coloniser’ and ‘Colonised.

**THEORETICAL POSTULATIONS OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY**

Despite the polemics surrounding the concept of post colonialism, it is unarguable that the emergence of the ‘Post’ in literary and cultural studies in the 20th Century is a significant development that has radically widened the scope of literary theorising, criticism, and interpretation. Depending on the context in which it is employed, ‘post’ connotes both ‘a succession’ as well as ‘a transcending of existing perspectives. From post-structuralism, post-Marxism, postmodernism, to postcolonial criticism, the aim has been to interrogate dominant epistemologies and re-theorise their claims in the light of emerging new knowledge.

A reaction to Western imperialist history and intellectual ideology, it seeks to dismantle the epistemologies of intellectual hegemony cultivated by the west via its academics as well as confront the ex-colonized with the options available for their critical redemption via alternative modes of discourse which may be different from those traditions of discourse fashioned by the west.

This politics of power and representation by the West which postcolonial criticism seeks to interrogate has been examined critically by Edward Said, in his influential works, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Known for his anti-colonial stance, Said in both works argues that in order to bolster its claim of superiority, there is a condescending zeal by the West to interiorise, marginalise and stereotype other history and cultures which it does not understand or which it knows very little about. For him, the West has a limited and over-simplified concept of the ‘East’ and believes in the supremacy of its values, while relegating the values and cultures of others as ‘uncivilised’. Said questions the West’s notion of history and authority of knowledge and calls for its re-valuation. Homi Bhabha (1994) in the same mode of thinking posits that colonial ideology rests upon a “Manichaean structure” that divides the world into dichotomous identity categories of the civil and the barbaric, the “us” and the “them”. In his estimation: “the objective of colonialist discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.” Thus, postcolonial theory on the one hand takes the garb of a counter-canon, a revision of dominant Western postulation about its perceived ‘Other’. Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995) concurs to this thinking.

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In writings as various as romances, memoirs, adventure tales or the later poetry of Tennyson, the view of the world as directed from the colonial metropolis was consolidated and confirmed. Thus, it also followed almost automatically that resistance to imperial domination (especially on the part of those who lacked guns or money) frequently assumed textual form.

As a ‘radical’ literary construct, at least in its ideological commitment, postcolonial theory acquires different significations in the context of African and ‘Third World” literature. It is an epistemology which seeks to rupture the absolutist claims of Western epistemology, including its representations of Africa and other ‘Third World’ countries especially in literary, philosophical, and cultural discourses. In other words, postcolonial criticism sets out to ‘comment on, and criticise colonial hegemony and the process of decolonisation’ in former colonised nations. The leading postcolonial critics and writers include Homi Bhaba, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, and J. M. Coetzee.

Edward Ako (2004), tracing the transition of Commonwealth Literature into postcolonial literature, observes that postcolonial critics deal with problems of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, caste, class, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe, such as history, literature, philosophy, linguistics and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. Thus, in its engagement with literature postcolonial criticism, especially for the ‘Third World’, is a politico-literary discourse which in the words of Rehnuma Sazzad “opposes the power-knowledge nexus” constructed by the West and devising in the alternative, fresh ways of approaching old epistemologies. Thus, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) epitomises the postcolonial as a counter-narrative to Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (1902) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) respectively. J.M Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), in the same light, represents a revision of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). These are Western ‘Master Texts’ which portray distorted images of Africa and its people. Postcolonial criticism therefore takes as part of its objectives the critique of ‘Colonial ethos’ reflected in ‘Colonialist texts’.

Beyond the claims of counterbalancing, the dominant discursive ethos of the West, postcolonial African writers also foreground the political tensions in their emergent independent states. With the failure of political independence to usher in the dividends of democratisation in many African countries, disillusionment has set in, and writers in their works reflect these social dissonances manifested in political instability, ethnic identity, inequality, and corruption, abuse of power and leadership failure. The effects and aftermaths of colonisation become a fascinating theme of these writers, including the wide socio-economic inequality in society which often results in conflict. In all, postcolonial critics always share a sense of solidarity with the oppressed and marginalised.

It has been stated that postcolonial theory tilts strongly towards the incorporation of politics into literary theorising. Postcolonial criticism often interrogates the dichotomy between history and fictional representation, ‘Otherness’ and hybridity and their relationship to issues of identity. However, as a theoretical construct, Post colonialism provokes both ‘critical acclaim’ and ‘critical bashing’, especially among ‘Third World’ scholars.

The term post-colonial criticism implies that colonialism is a thing of the past, while it is not. Colonialism is no longer practised as it was between the late 15th and mid-20th centuries, through the direct, overt administration of governors and educators from the colonising country. But today, through different means, the same kind of political, economic, and cultural subjugation of vulnerable nations occurs at the hands of international corporations from such world powers as the United States, Germany, and Japan. Again, there are fears that postcolonial literature will be “colonised”—that is, interpreted according to European norms and standards-by the cultural Eurocentrism that dominates literary education and literary criticism the world over.

Postcolonial criticism helps us see the connections among all the domains of our experience - the psychological, ideological, social, political, intellectual, and aesthetic - in ways that show us just how inseparable these categories are in our lived experience of ourselves and our world. In addition, postcolonial theory offers us a framework for examining the similarities among all critical theories that deal with human oppression, such as Marxism, and feminism. Postcolonial criticism defines formerly colonised peoples as any population that has been subjected to the political domination of another population. Postcolonial critics draw examples from the literary works of African Americans as well as from the literature of aboriginal Australians or the formerly colonised population of India.

Most postcolonial critics analyse the ways in which a literary text, whatever its subject matter, is colonialist or anti-colonialist; that is, the ways in which the text reinforces or resists colonialism’s oppressive ideology. For example, in the simplest terms, a text can reinforce colonialist ideology through positive portrayals of the colonisers, negative portrayals of the colonised, or the uncritical representation of the benefits of colonialism for the colonised. Analogously, texts can resist colonialist ideology by depicting the misdeeds of the colonisers, the suffering of the colonised, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonised. Postcolonial criticism pursues not merely the inclusion of the marginalised literature of colonial peoples into the dominant canon and discourse, it also offers a fundamental critique of the ideology of colonial domination and at the same time seeks to undo the “imaginative geography” of Orientalist thought that produced conceptual as well as economic divides between ‘West and East’, ‘civilised and uncivilised’, ‘First and Third Worlds’. In this respect, postcolonial criticism is in a way activist and adversarial in its basic aims. It is a theory that has brought fresh perspectives to the role of colonial peoples (their wealth, labour and culture) in the development of modern European nation states.

Now we have arrived at the concluding part of the book.

To facilitate a comprehensive overview, some important points are recapitulated below:

1. Literature enhances the learners’ knowledge of the language system.
2. Literature exemplifies language use.
3. Literature enlivens the process of learning.
4. Literature provides access to the culture of the target language speaking community.
5. Literature develops creativity.
6. Literature paves the way for literary studies.
7. Literature develops intellectual, humanistic, moral, and aesthetic perceptions.

These are the benefits from the studying of literature which bestow on the learners. An activity of reading of literary texts, reinforce the learners command over the language system and, at the same time sharpen their interpretative skills.