

Ways of Looking at the Past: Part 2

IHS History: Lecture 5

Postcolonialism

- An actual historical period and a way particular way of thinking about the world
- Decolonisation did not end the hegemony and dominance of the former colonial powers
- This is made apparent in the world around us both directly and indirectly

What is postcolonial theory?

- To understand and highlight the continuity of the impact of the colonial encounter
- Emphasis on 'reading from the margins'
- A postcolonial reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* by Edward Said
- Synchronising domestic authority with international authority
- A normalisation of colonial rule
- The critique is not of the novel but of colonialism itself
- The novel is best appreciated when read through a postcolonial lens

A world divided into "us" and "them"

- Understanding 'Orientalism' (Edward Said, 1978)
- An institutionalisation of the study of 'other/ed' cultures
- Orientalism both a field of knowledge and a field of power
- The establishment of Western hegemony over 'Oriental' knowledge
- The creation of stereotypes and their subsequent transformation into historical "facts"
- The idea was to "emplot Oriental history, character and destiny" into a Western storyline
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QYrAqrpshw>

Spot the commonality

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjdjDz8jhN4>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_8fsG8Q1A
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb3gdUrIC4Q>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkV-YFTEy9o>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YykjpeuMNEk>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2q5n--XMTU>

Subaltern Studies

The historical Backdrop

- In the wake of a growing crisis of the Indian state in the 1970s
- A precarious nation state flailing to hold on to its dominance
- Sharpening of social and political inequalities and conflicts
- State challenged by different social and political movements
- Responded with repression: But not only repression
- coupled with patronage, money and populist rhetoric and slogans
- These measures secured the state's dominance but corroded the authority of its institutions

Subaltern Studies: The Historiographical Backdrop

- An embattled nationalist historiography
- Faced a relentless attack by the "cambridge school"
- Marxist historiography posed a challenge to both but was riddled issues of its own
- Their claim to represent the history of the masses remained debatable

Enter Subaltern Studies . . .

- Accused the colonialist, nationalist and marxist interpretations of robbing common people of their agency
- A new approach to restore history of the subordinated
- Started by an editorial collective of six scholars (later joined by more)
- Inspired from social and cultural history

WHAT IS SUBALTERN STUDIES?

- A key movement within postcolonial studies in the 1980s
- Who is the 'subaltern' in 'subaltern studies'
- Comes from Antonio Gramsci's use of the term in his prison diaries
- The Subaltern Studies historians' use of the term presented a point of departure from that of Gramsci's
- Analyses the binary relationship of the subaltern and the ruling classes
- Studies the interplay of dominance and subordination in colonial systems