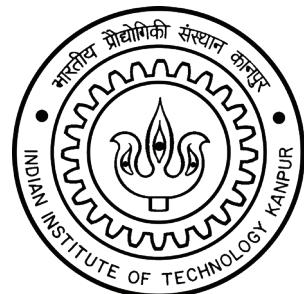


POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Humanities and Social Sciences
IIT Kanpur



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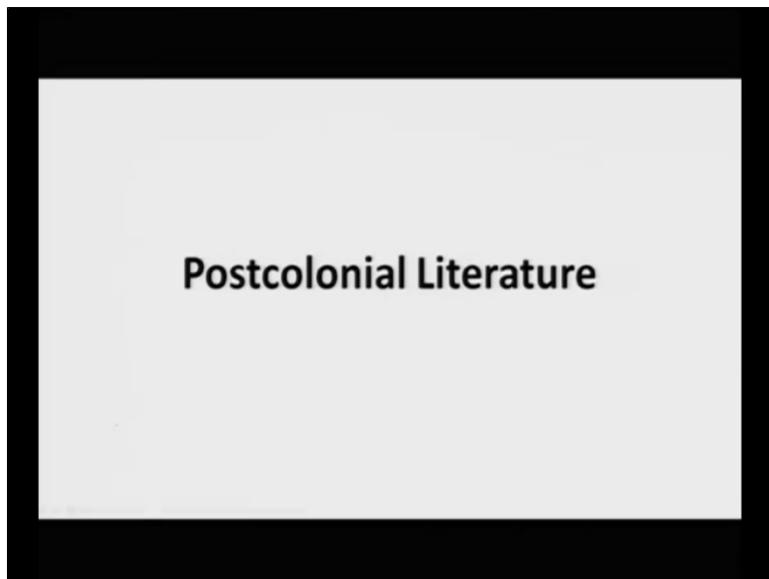
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Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #01
Introduction – What is Postcolonialism?

Hello and welcome to this course on postcolonial literature.

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Conventionally the study of English Literature in Indian universities and colleges has meant primarily a study of British literature. Or at most we include the study of American literature. In this new category, postcolonial literature, we encounter a fascinatingly wide array of literary texts that come from parts of the world as varied as India, West Indies, Africa, Canada, Australia, South America. And therefore, I think that, though this course is primarily aimed at graduate students of English literature, anyone who is interested in literature in general should benefit from this course.

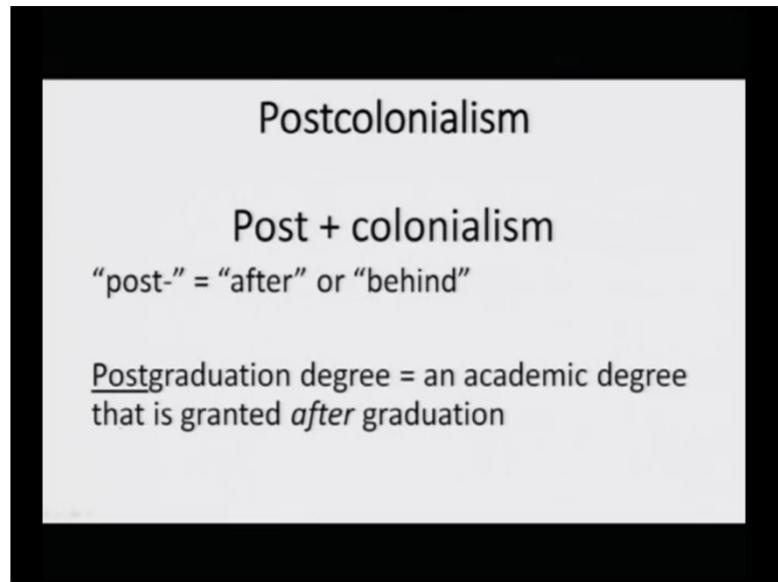
And since this particular course is going to read the wide variety of literary texts that I just mentioned against the backdrop of colonialism and resistance to colonialism, it should also appeal to students who are interested to know more about the cultural legacies of colonialism as well as those who want to actively engage with the process of decolonisation or think through the process of decolonisation.

Postcolonial literature, as some of us will know, is a fast expanding field of literary studies and just the numbers of academic journals, of books, of monograph series, of conference proceedings that are regularly brought out with the word postcolonial or postcolonialism in their title, that very number is now mind-boggling. This course will try to map some of the exciting possibilities as well as challenges that this new area of literary studies has thrown up and it will do so by discussing literary texts as well as critical texts which have come to form the canons of postcolonial literature. But even before we try and do that, we try and discover the kind of literature that this category contains, we should try and understand in depth the meaning of the word postcolonial or postcolonialism because at the end of the day this is the term which holds the literary category together and gives meaning to it.

But an attempt to understand the meaning of the term or to answer the question what is postcolonialism is fraught with difficulties. It is in fact a challenge. And I refer to it as a challenge primarily because for the past four decades now, this term postcolonialism has been used to mean various different things. In fact there is also no general consensus as to how the term postcolonial or postcolonialism should be written. Should it be written with a hyphen separating post and colonialism or should it be written as a single word? So our first task therefore would be to know how to navigate through this rather confusing warren of meanings as well as spellings of this term postcolonialism.

Now if you look at the word “postcolonialism” carefully, you will notice that it is composed of two different elements. The major element or the major component is of course the word “colonialism” but there is also a very important prefix that is attached to the word which is “post”. And that prefix adds an important dimension to our understanding of the term. Now if we go to the dictionary and look up the prefix “post”, we will see that generally it means “after” or “behind”. So if we attach the prefix “post” before a noun which denotes a particular event, then “post” indicates something that happens or comes after the event, that is indicated by the noun.

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So for instance, if we are looking at the word post-graduation, for instance, which also uses the same prefix “post”, then we will see that by adding the prefix post, the word post-graduation signifies something which comes after or happens after the graduation. So if we are talking about post-graduation degree, for instance, if I am doing a post-graduation degree in English, that will mean that I have already completed my graduation and I am now studying for a degree which can be obtained only after graduation.

If we try to decode the term postcolonialism using this same logic, then the term should mean the period that comes “after” colonialism. If you try and understand this particular meaning from within the Indian context, then we are almost inevitably directed towards a certain date and that date is of course 15th August 1947. As we all know, India till 1947 was a British colony and on 15th August 1947 we ceased to be a colony and we became a sovereign nation-state. Now this should mean therefore that the period in the history of India that comes after the date of our political independence is the history of postcolonial India. Now there are certain problems if you understand the term postcolonialism in this sense and I am going to come to these problems soon enough. But let me state here that this is not an altogether wrong understanding of the term postcolonialism.

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Indeed, the word postcolonial, used with a hyphen separating “post” and “colonial”, has often been used to refer to the post-independence history of states which were once politically part of large European empires. Which means that this equation, postcolonial means post-independence, is not an altogether wrong equation. But nevertheless this is not the mainstream understanding of the term postcolonialism within the field of postcolonial

studies, and to mark this difference, the word “postcolonialism” is used without the hyphen



by most scholars of postcolonial studies.

But what is the problem if you use postcolonialism to mean post-independence? Well even without a very well-rounded definition of colonialism at our hand, we are going to discuss that later, but right now even without a definition of colonialism, I think we all agree that colonialism has a number of different facets, different aspects. And the political aspect, though an important one, is not the only aspect of colonialism. To try and understand this further let us look at the date 15th August 1947 more closely. What exactly happened on that date? Well on that date we ceased to be politically governed by the British parliament or British monarch. They ceased having any direct political control over our affairs. But this political power which Britain exercised over India till 14th August 1947, till the date before independence, was only part of what we understand as British colonialism. Indeed, apart from the political domain, British colonialism also exerted a large amount of influence on the social, cultural, and economic spheres of India and those influences did not come to an abrupt stop when we achieved our independence on 15th August 1947.

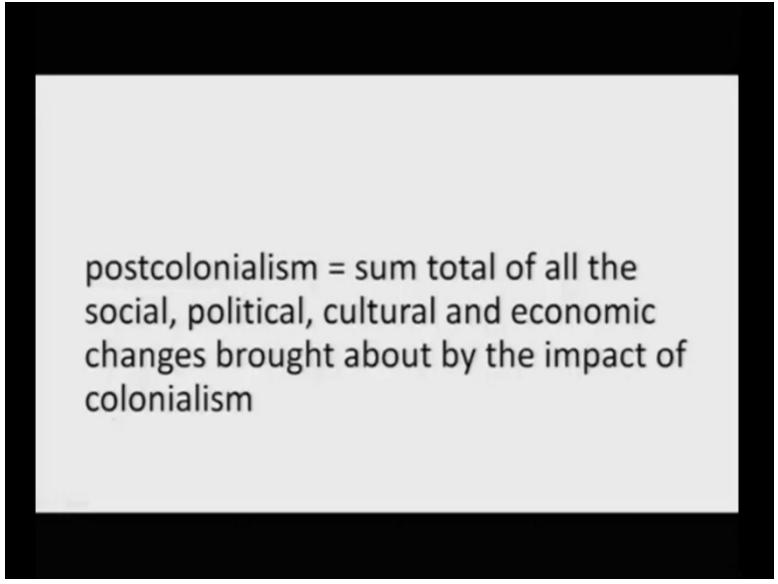
So even today, if we look around, we find ourselves surrounded by legacies of British colonialism which range from the miles and miles of railway tracks that criss-cross this country to the English language in which I am now communicating with you. Perhaps the most profound impact of British colonialism in India was economic. Because it was with the advent of colonialism that India became thoroughly integrated within a global network of capitalism and even seven decades after gaining political independence we are still very

much integrated within that global network of capitalism. So clearly not everything that constituted British colonialism in India has come to an end. Therefore, as far as understanding postcolonialism within the Indian context is concerned, a date like 15th August 1947 does not prove to be very useful.

Is there then any other way of understanding the term postcolonialism? Well there is. And if you think about the discussion that we have had so far you will realise that we have been trying to understand postcolonialism as signifying things which come after the end of colonialism. And that end is apparently signified by the date 15th August 1947 as far as India is concerned. But as we have seen, many aspects which constituted the process of colonialism, at least in the context of British Raj in India, has survived well beyond our date of political independence. And therefore it is not practicable to talk about the end of colonialism. But we get a new insight into things if we think of postcolonialism as a word that signifies not something that comes after the end of colonialism but as signifying things that come after the beginning of colonialism.

Now I can understand that this sounds slightly confusing. But to help us understand this better, and this is crucial, let us again use the familiar context of Indian history. Now if rather than the end of British colonialism in India, we have to look for its beginning, then we will see that we are pushed as far back as the 18th century when the Mughal emperor Farrukhshiyar issued a firman allowing the East India Company, the British East India company, there were in fact, a number of East India companies, the British East India company duty free trading rights in Bengal. And since the first quarter of the 18th century when the firman came into effect, the British colonial power started expanding their economic and political influence in India which was soon coupled by a strong socio-cultural influence as well. Now the impact of this colonial influence was such that the India that emerged after the first impact of colonialism was felt, was markedly different from the India that was there before the impact of colonialism.

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postcolonialism = sum total of all the
social, political, cultural and economic
changes brought about by the impact of
colonialism

Postcolonialism in this Indian context would therefore mean the sum total of all the various social, political, economic and cultural changes that started being perceived after the first impact of colonialism was felt. And if you notice here in the slide, I have spelt postcolonialism without the hyphen. So chronologically, postcolonial India is not the India after 1947 as far as the field of Postcolonial studies is concerned, rather it is the India which started emerging from the 18th century onwards as the colonial power, British colonial power, started spreading its influence across the land.

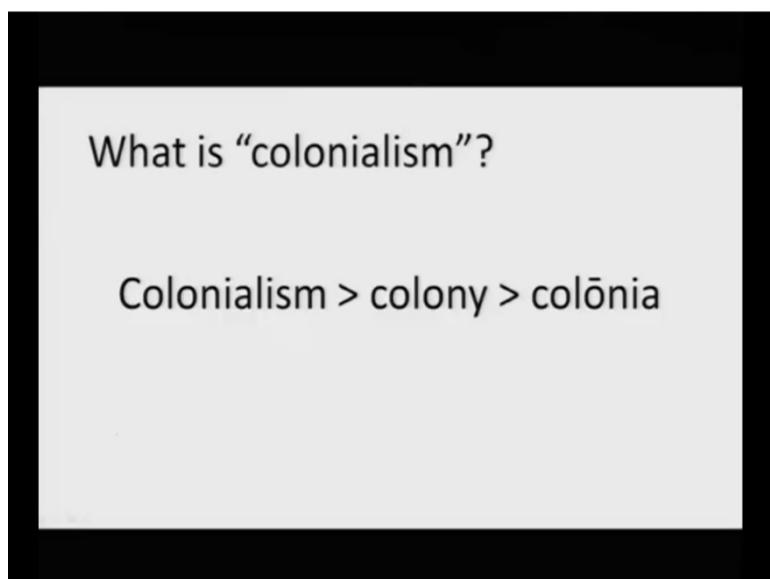
Now at this point, let us stop for a while and think about this new definition of postcolonialism that we have arrived at. If postcolonialism is the sum total of the social, economic, political, cultural changes that are brought about because of colonialism then are these changes relevant only for the colonised society and not for the colonising society? In other words, when we are talking about the British colonialism in India, can we only talk about the emergence of a postcolonial India and not about postcolonial Britain? Well that is a wrong assumption. Why? Because even a cursory acquaintance with the British history of 18th-century and 19th-century and even 20th-century would tell us that the British society was as deeply impacted, as deeply influenced by the process of colonialism as the Indian society.

And in fact this is not very difficult to comprehend if we keep in mind that colonialism is ultimately a two-way traffic, a two-way traffic of ideas, goods and people between the colonised and the colonising country. Therefore, it is implausible to think that colonialism

only affects the colonised people and not the colonisers. Thus, if we can talk about a postcolonial India, we can also with equal justice talk about the emergence of a postcolonial Britain.

Now so far, we have been talking about colonialism without really trying to explore its definition, its meanings but now let us look at it more closely. And if we want to understand what is colonialism, then the historical origin of the word provides us with a very interesting clue.

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The word colonialism has at its root the word colony which in turn is derived from the Latin word “colōnia”. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “colōnia” as “farms” or “landed estates” which were located in newly conquered territories of the Roman empire, and were originally given as gifts to Roman citizens who are mostly veteran soldiers. And establishing such Roman colonies in an otherwise hostile territory ensured that the occupied land remained under control and among the various colonies that Roman had, London was a very prominent one.

Now this understanding of colony and colonialism, via the root word “colōnia”, throws up a number of interesting points. The first point is that colonialism or the process of establishing colonies is essentially a violent process because it involves forcibly occupying the land and using the territorial resources that originally belonged to someone else. Colonies are therefore sites of hostility and violence. As we will see in this course, the colonial violence that I just

mentioned makes itself felt at several different levels - social, economic, cultural. But these more abstract kinds of violence are almost always coupled with the brutalities of physical violence. And we see this for instance in Peru, via during the early decades of the 16th century, Spanish conquistadors reduced the native population from about half a crore, to around three lakhs.

We again see this more recently in the 1893 war against the Matabele kingdom, which is in present day Zimbabwe, where the British forces almost mowed down their African opponents like grass using the newly invented Maxim gun, which is a special kind of a machine gun. So, though in this course we will talk a lot about the cultural violence perpetrated by colonialism as well as resistance to this cultural violence, we should not become blind to the physical violence, to the gruesome physical violence which almost always underlines the process of colonialism.

The second point to note in the dictionary definition of the Latin word “colōnia”, which informs the present day use of the word colonialism, is that though Roman colonia were settlements away from the heart of Italy which was the centre of the Roman empire, they were nevertheless inhabited by people who still retained their rights as Roman citizens and who represented the political and economic interests of their mother country in the distant territory of the colonies. Therefore, when we are talking about colonialism which derives from this Roman model, we are always talking about this relationship between a mother country, which is otherwise called metropolis and from where the colonising people come, and the conquered country which is transformed into a colony so that its resources can be siphoned off.

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If we look at this world map of 1921, here the shaded areas represent the British colonial empire. And here you can see that the comparatively small island of Britain is acting as the colonial mother country or metropolis over a huge territory that includes South Asia, which of course contains present day Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka. There is also Burma. It contains vast stretches of Africa, it contains Canada, it contains Australia, it contains New Zealand.

Now it can be argued that such territorial conquests and expansion, as this map shows, was always a part of human history. As we have seen, even the British capital of London, which acted as a centre of the metropolis of this entire huge colonial empire, was itself once a colony of the Roman empire. So doesn't this make the history of colonialism really the entire history of humanity?

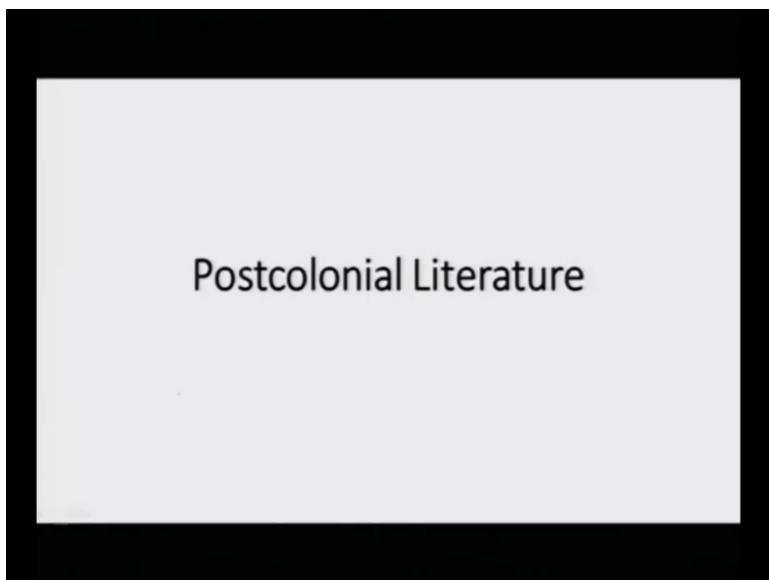
Well it may be so but as far as postcolonial studies is concerned, the focus is on the kinds of colonialism that emerged since the sixteenth century and that were driven primarily by the profit making motives of capitalism. We will be discussing this relationship between colonialism and capitalism later on, but before that we will have to try and understand postcolonialism and its relation to literature. This will be our topic for the next lecture. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #02
Commonwealth Literature

Welcome back to the course on postcolonial literature.

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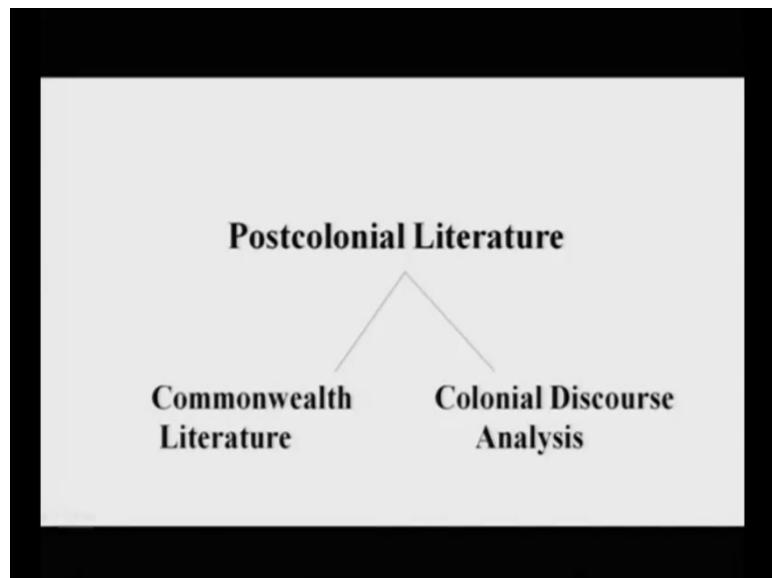


Now in our previous lecture, we discussed the various meanings of the term postcolonialism, and we also explored the various nuances of the two components - the word “colonialism” as well as the prefix “post” - which comes together to form the word postcolonialism. In today’s lecture we will try to understand the relevance of the term postcolonialism from within the field of literary studies.

But before we begin our discussion on that, it is important to note here that the word postcolonialism, unlike, say for instance, the word “imaging”, was not specifically coined to signify a particular kind of literature. In fact, the use of the term postcolonialism, which can be traced as far back as the late 19th century, had little connection with the field of literature till almost the late 1980’s. And till that time in fact, the word postcolonialism was primarily used as an adjective to refer to conditions or situations which occurred or existed after the end of colonial rule in places like America for instance or India.

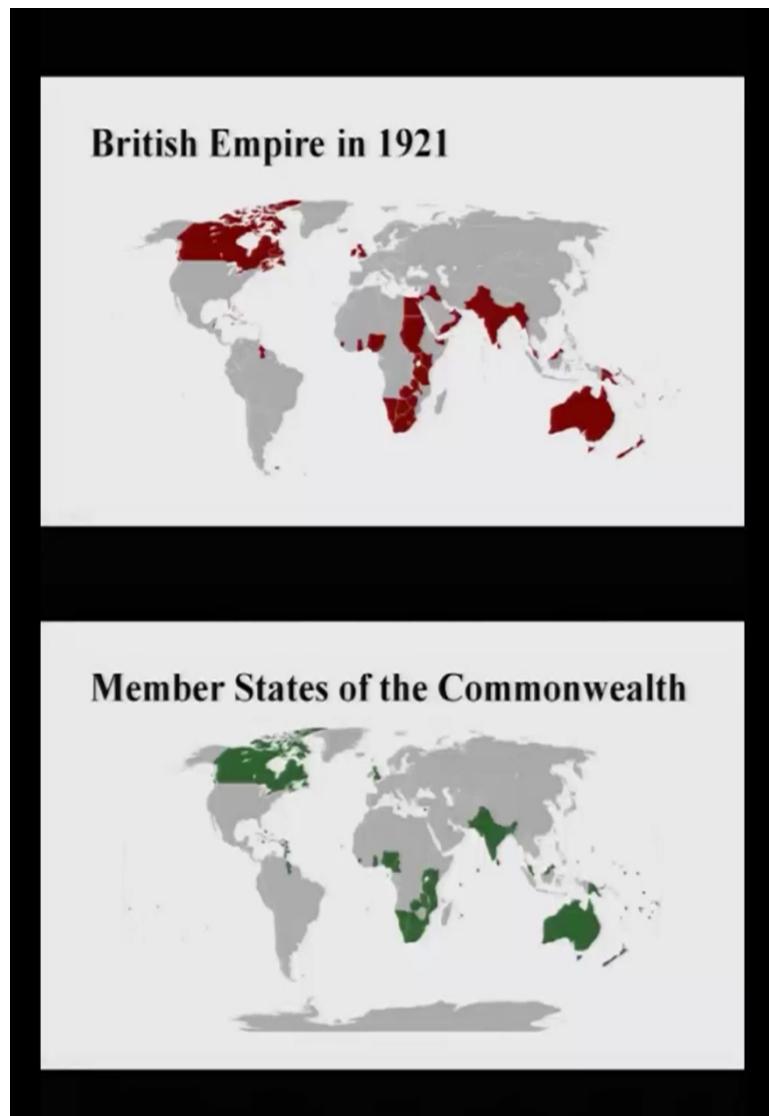
So in this context postcolonialism meant post-independence and it was almost always used, the word postcolonialism was almost always used with a hyphen separating “post” from “colonialism”. Now it was only since the late 1980’s and the 1990’s that postcolonialism became an integral part of literary discussions and it brought together two already existing areas of study within the field of English literature.

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If you look at the slide then you will see that the first area which got incorporated within the field of postcolonial literature was referred to as “commonwealth literature”. And the other area was referred to as the study of “colonial discourse” or “colonial discourse analysis”. So these two separate aspects came together to form the field of postcolonial studies and they in a way form the roots of postcolonial literature as a field of literary studies.

So therefore it is very important to understand these two constituent parts if we want to explore postcolonial literature at any length. So today let us start with the category of commonwealth literature. Now the word commonwealth signifies a grouping of nation. A grouping of those nations or those nation states which were once British colonies. The British empire which had reached its peak in terms of occupied territory by the 1920’s, and here you can see the map of the British empire in 1921, this empire as depicted in this map, by the shaded area in this map, had started breaking up from 1940’s. And in fact, India was



one of the first nation states to break away from the British empire. Now the sovereign nation states which were emerging out of the British empire and which shared a common history of British colonialism, voluntarily decided to form a confederation with the British monarch as its head. And this confederation of sovereign states which were once British colonies came to be known as the commonwealth. And this grouping of nation of course still exists.

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And this is a map of the states that form the commonwealth today. And if you see that the highlighted areas in green are the countries which are the member states. If you look at this map carefully, you will realise that not all countries which were British colonies are now part of the commonwealth. Of course, some states which were once part of the commonwealth decided to leave later on, for instance, the African state of Gambia or more recently Maldives, they have left the commonwealth, initially they were part of the commonwealth. But there is

one country which, though it was a British colony at one point of time, was never really a part of the commonwealth of nations. And that country which is conspicuous by its absence is of course the United States of America. Now if you remember your history, you will know that the United States of America was part of the British empire, was ruled from Britain till 1776.

Indeed, even today America celebrates the 4th of July every year as its date of independence from the British rule. But this erstwhile British colony does not feature in the list of commonwealth nations and it is of course an anomaly. And this anomaly is only one of the anomalies which plague the concept of commonwealth. And, in fact, the number of anomalies got compounded when the term commonwealth started being used by the academicians to designate a particular kind of literature.

The first major attempt to use the term commonwealth to denote a specific literary category was made in 1964 when the University of Leeds in England organised what was called the first Commonwealth Literature Conference. And this conference was an effort to bring under a single umbrella the significant amount of English literature that was coming out of the once colonised part of the British empire. For instance, by the time of the conference by the 1960's, authors like R.K. Narayan from India, V.S. Naipaul from the West Indian island of Trinidad, Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, all these authors who belonged to the once colonised part of the world, colonised by Britain, were being regularly published in Britain and in America and their names had become quite familiar within the field of literary studies.

Now this conference organised by the University of Leeds was an attempt to bring authors like Naipaul, Narayan, Achebe to the fore and to form a field of literary studies around their works. And this field of literary studies was referred to as a field of commonwealth literature. Now, just like in the political group of commonwealth nations America remains conspicuously absent, even in the category of commonwealth literature, the literature of America never featured. But what was even more curious was that the category of commonwealth literature never included the literature of Britain, in spite of the fact that Britain was and still is very much a part of the commonwealth of nations and it was the metropolitan country of the colonial empire. But, in spite of that, British literature was never a part of the category that was studied and discussed using the name Commonwealth literature.

The Indian born novelist Salman Rushdie, while attending another conference on Commonwealth Literature held nearly twenty years after the first conference at Leeds, noted that there was in fact a politics going on behind how the term Commonwealth literature, the category Commonwealth literature was being used. His argument was that Commonwealth literature was used to group under itself all the English literatures that were emerging from the once colonised parts of the world but it did not include British literature because it wanted to segregate the English literature emerging from the colonies as a separate group of literature. Now why this segregation? According to Rushdie there was no way that such a significant amount of English literature could be altogether avoided. But the next best thing was, according to Rushdie, to separate this amount of literature coming from the colonies under a separate category and to label them in a manner that they can be identified as English literature which was not really at par with British literature. So it was a category of inferior kind of English literature almost. This was according to Rushdie the hidden politics that was being played out in the metropolitan universities when the Commonwealth literature was being discussed as a category. What also concerned Rushdie was that within the field of Commonwealth literature, the authors and their works were arranged in neat subgroups according to their nations of origin. It was thus expected that an author born in India will write only about India and his or her writings will represent an essence of Indianness that was unique and that was uncontaminated by anything else. That is for instance, a novel by R.K. Narayan for instance was supposed to embody a unique essence of “Indianness” that was assumed to be different from say the essence of “Australianness” that one might find in the writings of someone like Patrick White, which in turn was supposed to be different from say the essence of “West Indianness” that was supposedly found in the work of V.S. Naipaul.

Now such an attitude towards literature was problematic at two different levels. Firstly, the post 16th century period of European colonialism was also marked by a tremendous amount of human movement. People moved around a lot because travel was much easier compared to earlier times. And they moved around either because they could afford to travel or because they were displaced, forcibly evicted due to various economic and political reasons. Take the case of Rushdie for instance. Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay. He then went to England as a student and subsequently settled down there. His family in turn moved from India to Pakistan and settled down in Pakistan. Now Rushdie of course has written a lot about India but he has also written about Britain, as well as about Pakistan. So does this make Rushdie an

Indian author, does it make him a Pakistani author, does it make him a British author? What is that national category under which we should keep the works of Rushdie?

It is a problem, it is a conundrum. And if it is so difficult to pin down an author coming from one of the ex-British colonies, then it is not difficult to imagine how impossible it would be to pin down entire cultures within the confines of one nation state or another. Take for instance again the example of another Indian author Rabindranath Tagore. Now Tagore's work proved to be very influential in South America after his poetry was translated by the Argentine author Victoria Ocampo. Similarly the literary technique of magic realism which was invented by authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez in South America during the 1960's and 1970's influenced various Indian novelists including Salman Rushdie. Now the category of Commonwealth literature, by not factoring in this interconnected nature of literary and cultural influences as well as the problematic relationship of authors from ex-colonies with the land of their origin, was failing as a category, a category through which works of authors as different as Rushdie, Achebe, Naipaul and Narayan can be studied together.

The attempt to read literature by using national framework was also problematic in another way. The literature that a commonwealth nation like India for instance produces is produced in many different languages. Isn't it? English is definitely one of the languages in which Indian literature is produced but that is far from being the only language in which Indian literature is produced.

Now, though the category of Commonwealth literature used the concept of nation and national traditions to group authors and their works, it never really looked beyond the English literature that was coming out of the colonies. And as the case of India shows us that such a focus on English literature is not only a very limited focus but it is also not in sync with the complex literary landscape that the erstwhile colonies of Britain presented.

So Commonwealth literature, therefore, soon became an unworkable category, both because it was not international enough and because it was not national enough. Not international enough because it did not take into account the cross-cultural influences and the cross territorial affiliations of the authors coming from the once colonised parts of the world. And simultaneously not national enough because it was not taking into account the various kinds of non-English literature that was also emerging out of the colonies.

However, the most problematic aspect of the category commonwealth literature was the way it connected the literature coming out of the colonies with the colonial empire. The notion of

a commonwealth headed by the British monarch is almost inevitably informed by a spirit of nostalgia for the bygone days of the British empire. Indeed the category of Commonwealth literature can be interpreted at one level as an attempt to culturally keep together an empire which was no longer a political reality. But political decolonisation was achieved by the nation-states that emerged out of the shadow of British rule through a prolonged anti-colonial struggle and the authors who came out of these parts of the world, the once colonised parts of the world, were heirs to this anti-colonial legacy as well as to the legacies of colonialism. It is therefore no wonder that the feeling of nostalgia for the colonial empire that lurked, and I would say still lurks, behind the term commonwealth would make the label of commonwealth literature unattractive to some of the very authors that it supposedly describes. And this kind of aversion towards the category of commonwealth literature was perhaps best displayed when the novelist Amitav Ghosh refused to let his novel *The Glass Palace* be considered for the 2001 Commonwealth Writers prize. One major reason for this decision, as Ghosh writes in his letter that he sent to the award giving committee, had to do with the nostalgic memorialisation of the colonial past which informed the idea of commonwealth. According to Ghosh, such glorification or such glorified memorialisation of the colonial past was precisely what he was trying to resist through his novels like *The Glass Palace*. And, therefore, he could not allow it to be included within the race for a prize that had the word commonwealth associated with it. And this was true for many writers who were emerging from the ex-colonies of Britain. They were writing against the idea of the colonial empire.

Yet the category of commonwealth literature remained largely impervious to these elements of anti-colonialism. So by the 1990's commonwealth literature as a literary category was losing favour and it was losing favour for various different reasons. We have already discussed them. But in this slide I have enumerated them.

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Shortcomings of “Commonwealth Literature” as a category

- It neither included the literature of erstwhile colonies like America, nor the literature of metropolitan Britain
- It did not take into account the cross cultural influences and the cross territorial affiliation of authors from the ex-colonies
- It did not take into account the non-English literatures of commonwealth nations
- It involved a nostalgic glorification of the legacies of colonialism

So commonwealth literature was problematic as a category firstly because it neither included the literature of erstwhile colonies like America nor did it include the literature of metropolitan Britain. It was also problematic because it did not take into account the cross-cultural influences and the cross-territorial affiliations of authors from the ex-colonies. It did not take into account the non-English literatures that was emerging from commonwealth nations like India for instance. And finally the category of commonwealth literature involved a nostalgic glorification of the legacies of colonialism. So these were the various problems because of which the category of commonwealth literature was losing favour within literary circles and it started losing favour by the 1990's. And 1990's was the time when postcolonial literature emerged as a replacement.

Now if we look at the kind of literature that was being grouped together using the term postcolonial, we will see that there is not much difference between postcolonial literature or what was being discussed as postcolonial literature and the archive of commonwealth literature. For instance, authors like R.K. Narayan, Derek Walcott, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, all of them who were being read under the banner of commonwealth literature were also relevant within the category of postcolonial literature.

However, though the literature remained the same, almost the same, the critical approach to this literature underwent a sea change. As we will see later in this course, unlike commonwealth literature, the field of postcolonial studies is underlined by a keen awareness of the fact that both cultures as well as people who produce these cultures, both of them are incessantly travelling, they are crossing borders, they are intermixing with one another and they are not fixed within national boundaries.

Also it is worth noting that though postcolonial literature too concerns itself primarily with literature written in English, yet unlike commonwealth literature there is a genuine attempt to incorporate non-English literatures within its canon. And one good example would be the works of the Bengali author Mahasweta Devi, which forms today part of the canon of postcolonial literature. It is very much a part of discussions on postcolonial literature today. And the original works of Mahasweta Devi of course are all in Bengali and not in English.

However, having said this one should also admit that postcolonial literary studies still predominantly confined itself to English language and even though I said that Devi's works are popular within the field of postcolonial literature, yet they are accessed only as translations, in their translated forms. And Gayatri Spivak, a name that you will later encounter during this course, is one of the major theorist of postcolonial literature and also the English translator of Mahasweta Devi's work.

However, the most radical change in the approach to literary texts that distinguishes postcolonial literature from commonwealth literature is the former's focus, the focus of postcolonial literature, on anti-colonial resistance. Whereas commonwealth literature was informed by colonial nostalgia, by a glorification almost of the legacies of colonialism, postcolonial literature is informed by a highly critical approach towards colonialism.

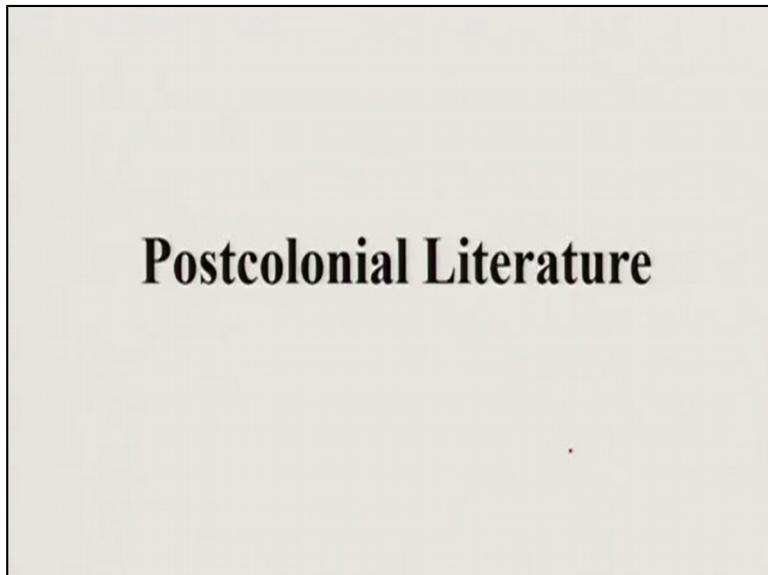
Indeed, postcolonial literature is not merely a grouping of literature that has emerged out of the colonies or ex-colonies of Britain. Rather it is a grouping of literature which attempts to subvert and undo the effects of colonial violence. This critical attitude which informs the postcolonial studies today is a legacy of what I have referred to earlier in this lecture as "colonial discourse analysis". And we will learn more about this concept of "colonial discourse analysis" in our next lecture. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #03
Colonial Discourse Analysis: Michel Foucault

Hello and welcome to another lecture on postcolonial literature.

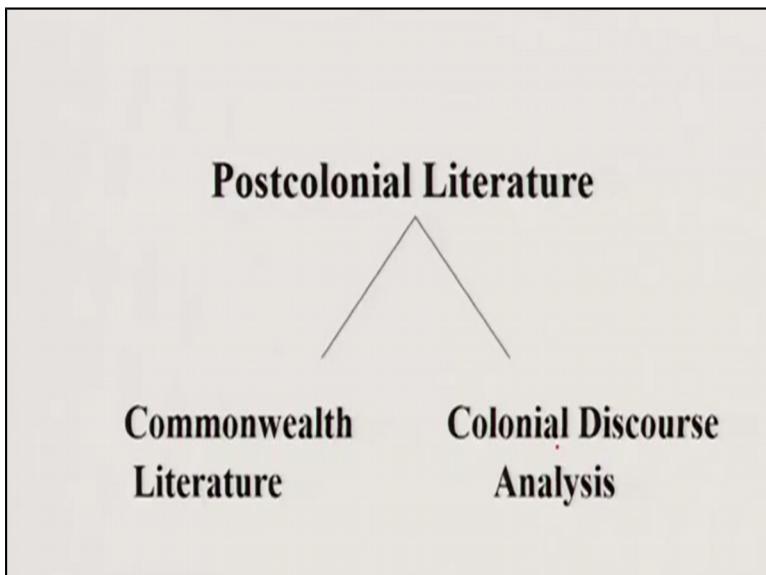
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Postcolonial Literature

Now in our previous meeting, we discussed how the field of Postcolonial literature combines within itself two already existing areas of study. And what are these studies?

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Postcolonial Literature

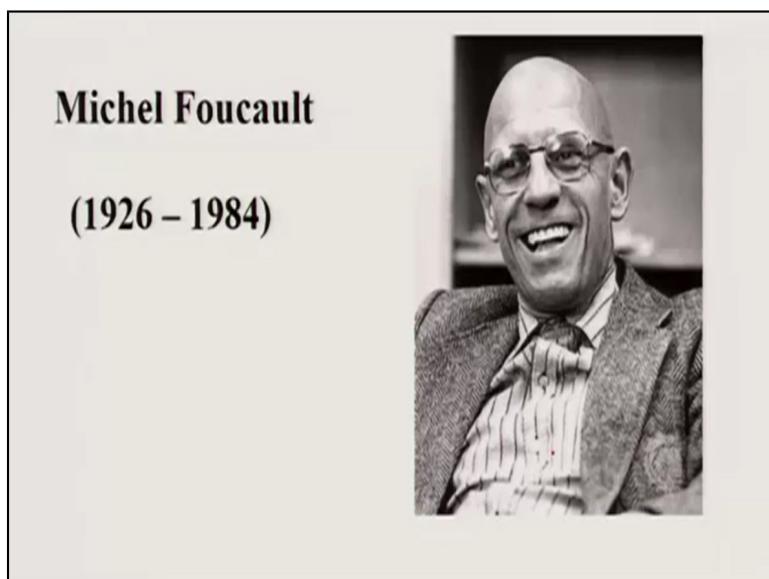


**Commonwealth
Literature**

**Colonial Discourse
Analysis**

One is the study of commonwealth Literature, the other is what we are calling colonial discourse analysis or the study of colonial discourse. And among these two, we have already discussed the category of commonwealth literature at some length. And therefore, today we are going to take up colonial discourse analysis. Now if you remember the first lecture of this course you will know that there we had defined colonialism, or more specifically the post 16th century forms of colonialism as a capitalism driven enterprise where one country or group of people forcefully acquires the land and economic resources belonging to another country or group of people for the purpose of profit making. Now our concern today is how does this process of violent subjugation, that is colonialism, relate to the idea of discourse. Now to understand this we have turn to the works of the 20th century French intellectual Michel Foucault.

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And here you have the image of Michel Foucault and also his dates which are 1926 to 1984. And we need to turn to the writings of Foucault because it is from there that postcolonial studies primarily derives its understanding of discourse.

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What is a discourse?

Discourse is a set of meaningful statements, oral or written, on any given topic

So what is a discourse? If we consult a dictionary, we will see that the simplest definition of discourse is that it is a set of meaningful statements, made orally or in writing, on a given topic. The insight that Michel Foucault brings to this simple definition of discourse through his works like *The Archaeology of Knowledge* or through his essays like “The Order of Discourse” is that there are certain deep-seated regulations which structure and limit the creation and circulation of discourse.

In other words, what Foucault was saying is that though in theory the number of things that we can say or write about is infinite, in practice the number of meaningful statements that we can make is actually strictly limited by certain factors. Now what are these factors that limits discourse?

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Regulations and Limits of Discourse

1. Taboo

2. Madness/Sanity

3. Institutional Ratification

Foucault primarily talks about three factors. The first one is taboo, the second one is the distinction between madness and sanity and the third one is institutional ratification. Let us start with the notion of taboo, which is the first in our list. Now in any society at any given point of time you will see that there are always prohibitions surrounding certain topics. Any discussion on these topics which are considered taboo or which are considered prohibited are therefore socially looked down upon. Therefore, there is an absence of discourse on certain topics within certain social milieus. So take for instance the subject of sexuality. Even today certain areas of sexuality are considered to be taboos in our society and therefore it becomes very difficult to talk about, say for instance, sexual violence that happens within the confines of domesticity. Now though our ability to talk about sexual violence has increased greatly from say what it was hundred years back, yet certain areas of sexuality and sexual violence still remains taboo.

Such prohibited subjects, which I am calling tabooed subjects, they may vary from one society to another and in fact from one time to another, but the fact remains that whatever be the variation there will always be some subjects which are impossible or at least extremely difficult to discourse. Some subjects around which discourse formation is extremely difficult. And that fact remains constant in every society. Thus, though in theory the topics on which we can have a discourse is infinite, in practice we cannot talk or write about anything and everything.

Now let us come to the second point, which is the distinction between madness and sanity. And according to Michel Foucault, the notion of madness and sanity also acts as another important factor limiting the possibility of discourse. For instance, if someone says that “humans walk on their heads”, then in all likelihood that person will be taken as mad and his

or her statements will be considered as outpourings of an insane mind which do not have any meaning. Thus, if discourse is to be understood as composed of meaningful statements, then someone who is deemed mad is by definition someone who cannot create a discourse. So, even though a mad person might be able to speak, the speech never gains the acceptance of a discourse.

Now here it is important to note that like the concept of tabooed subjects, the definition of madness too changes with time and place. That is to say, different societies separated from one another by time or space might draw the line separating madness from sanity differently. And in fact there is a very interesting work by Foucault on this aspect titled *Madness and Civilisation*. But however a society might choose to demarcate madness from sanity the basic concept of madness remains present in all society. Which means that in any given society, at any given point of time, there would always be a group of statements which will be kept out of the pale of discourse because of its association with madness.

Now apart from taboo and madness, Foucault also talks about institutional ratification as an important factor that limits the proliferation of discourse. If we think carefully then we will understand that our process of knowing something and talking or writing meaningfully about those things are closely guided by various institutions like schools, colleges, publishing industry, news agencies, learned societies, scientific laboratories, so on and so forth. If I were to state today that the sun goes around the earth, this would not be admitted as part of a meaningful discourse because it won't be ratified by these institutions which regulate knowledge production and knowledge dissemination in today's world. Yet at one point in history this very statement that the sun revolves around the earth enjoyed institutional validity. Thus for instance during the 16th and early 17th century Europe, it was the geocentric model of the universe which enjoyed institutional validity and proponents of the heliocentric models like for instance Galileo Galilei, who claimed that it was the earth that revolved round the sun rather than it being the other way around, were imprisoned and stopped from propagating this new idea. As this example shows, institutions therefore closely control the discourse by regulating the circulation of statements and by prioritising and foregrounding certain statements, while marginalising or even gagging certain other opposing statements. And if the social situation is underlined by a power imbalance, then it is the institutions of the more powerful that controls or that regulates knowledge and its discursive manifestation. Therefore the kinds of discourses that are prevalent in any given situation largely depends on the institutions which regulate and ratify the production and dissemination

of knowledge. And which will be the institute which will get to regulate the discourse? Well the institutions that are associated with the powerful.

Now here with this last statement we come to another very important idea of Michel Foucault that is significant if we are trying to understand colonial discourse analysis. And the big idea that we are talking about here is this:

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Power and Knowledge are interrelated

that power and knowledge are interrelated. As I stated just now, if in a society there is power imbalance then it is the institutions of the more powerful that gets to regulate knowledge and its discursive manifestation. To try and understand this let us look at this statement.

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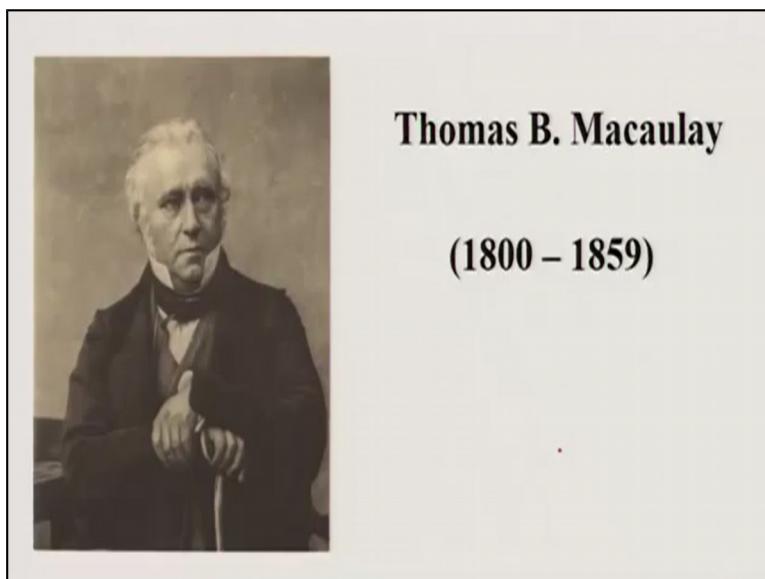
“I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But [...] I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

Minutes Upon Indian Education
2nd February, 1835

“I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But [...] I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. [...] I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

Now, this statement is extracted from a document dated 2nd February 1835 and the document is titled “Minutes upon Indian Education”. The author of this document is this gentleman here:

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his name is Thomas Babington Macaulay and his dates are 1800 to 1859, and while writing these words Macaulay was employed as a member of the Governor General's Council. And Governor General's Council was a body which looked after East India Company's affairs in India. So he was a part of that institution or that body.

Now such a statement that Macaulay makes, which denigrates the rich tradition of Indian and Arabic literature and compares the whole of it with just a single library shelf of European books, is at best a thoroughly biased statement. Indeed, listening to it today one might be tempted to dismiss it as a rambling of a mad person. Yet, in 1835 this statement was not dismissed as madness. In fact, it was taken very seriously, and it was taken seriously because Macaulay was making this statement from a position of power. As a member of the Governor General's Council, Macaulay represented colonial authority that was backed by Britain's military, and economic domination of India and the Middle East. The very fact that the Governor General's Council, to which Macaulay belonged, represented the institution of the

powerful colonisers, gave the statements issued by one of its members an unquestioned truth value and this in spite of the fact that Macaulay did not know either Sanskrit or any other Indian or middle eastern languages for that matter.

So it does not take much of an imagination to figure out that if Sanskrit or Arabic scholars from India or the Middle East were asked to compare their literary traditions with the tradition of European literature they would come up with an assessment that would be very different from Macaulay's assessment. Yet their status as representatives of a subjugated population meant that their statements never enjoyed the institutional backing that was given to the statement of Macaulay. So in any situation characterised by such an imbalance of power, it is always the discourse of the powerful that gets circulated as true knowledge.

Now in our discussion so far we have tried to demonstrate how power influences knowledge and discourse. But Foucault's understanding of the power knowledge interrelationship tells us that knowledge and its discursive manifestations also influence power and how power is enacted. So it is not merely power which influences knowledge, it is also the other way around. Knowledge and its discursive manifestations also influence power and its enactment. To understand this let us go back to Macaulay's statement. This highly biased statement, which today frankly sounds ridiculous, not only enjoyed widespread circulation because of its relationship with colonial authority but it in turn influenced how colonial authority should function in India. So Macaulay's 1835 "Minutes upon Indian Education" was soon turned into a legal act which was called English Education Act of 1835. And this act resulted in East India Company diverting all the funds allocated for the purpose of education in India to English education. This meant in turn depriving the educational institutes in India that taught Sanskrit or Persian for instance and depriving them of all monetary support.

In other words, Macaulay's discourse resulted in an exercise of colonial power that sought to systematically destroy all native institutions of learning because all native institutions of higher learning, prior to the advent of the British, use either Sanskrit or Persian as medium of instruction. Now this connection between discourse and colonial power relations was most elaborately explained in a book titled *Orientalism* which was published in 1978. It was authored by the Palestine born American professor, professor of literature, Edward Said.

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Edward W. Said

(1935 – 2003)



And here you can see his image and his dates which are 1935 to 2003. Edward Said is widely regarded as the founder of postcolonial studies and what we now know as colonial discourse analysis was something that was initiated by his book *Orientalism*. In that particular seminal text as well as in his later works like *Culture and Imperialism*, Said contends that the expansion of post 16th century European colonialism, especially in Asia, was inherently connected with a particular kind of discourse, a kind of discourse which Said refers to as the discourse of Orientalism.

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Instances of the Discourse of Orientalism

- Greek tragedies produced during the 5th century BCE by playwrights like Aeschylus
- Nineteenth and Twentieth-century texts written by authors like Gérard de Nerval, Gustave Flaubert and Joseph Conrad

And Said further argues in these texts that much of Western literature ranging from Greek tragedies produced during the 5th century BCE by playwrights like Aeschylus to 19th and

20th century novels written by novelist like Gustave Flaubert or Joseph Conrad, they all formed an integral part of this discourse of Orientalism which justified the colonial domination of the East by the West.

We will talk more about Edward Said, about Orientalism as well as the implications of connecting literature with colonialism in our next lecture. But today I would like to point out just one interesting thing before ending. Now Edward Said, who founded postcolonial studies, primarily focused on the literature that was produced from within the European colonial metropolis. And postcolonial literary studies, as the legacy bearer of Edward Said's works, therefore also includes discussion on metropolitan literature.

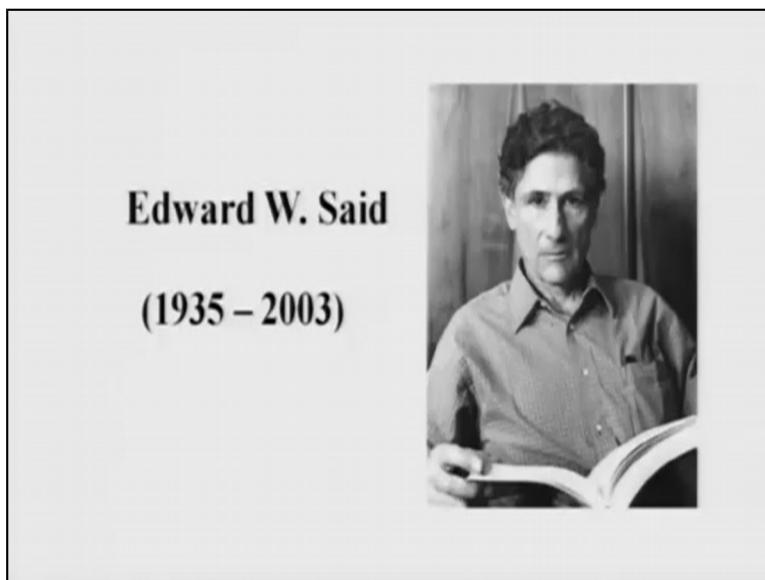
And here we find yet another point of distinction that separates postcolonial literary studies from the study of commonwealth literature. Because, as mentioned in my previous literature, one of the shortcomings of the category of commonwealth literature was that it is only focused on the literature that was coming out of the colonised parts of the world. In postcolonial studies, thanks to Said primarily, the novel of a British writer like Joseph Conrad is as much an object of study and discussion as for instance a novel written by an Indian novelist like Raja Rao. And this shift is crucial because it allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how colonialism relates to culture, not only to the culture of the colonised subjects but also to the culture of the coloniser. We will continue with this discussion on postcolonial literature in our next lecture. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #04
Colonial Discourse Analysis: Edward Said

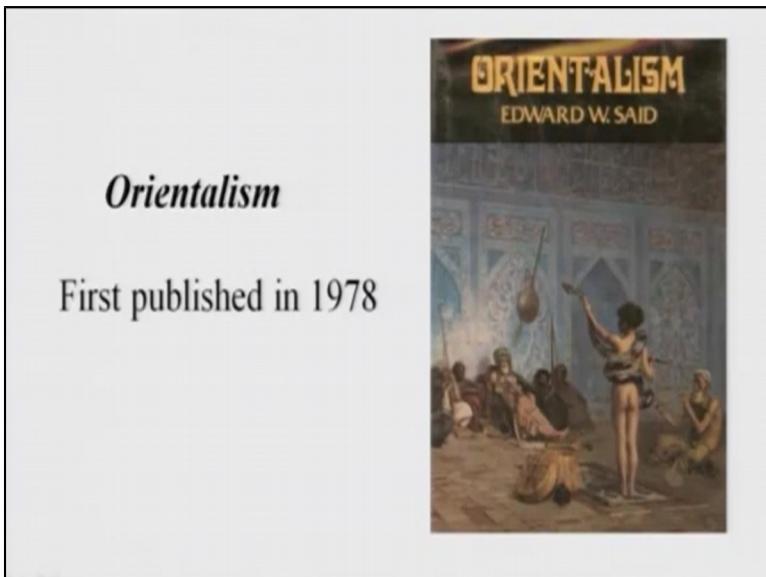
Hello and welcome to another lecture on postcolonial literature. Now if you remember, we had ended our previous discussion by briefly mentioning Edward Said and his book *Orientalism* and we had also mentioned how both Said and his book *Orientalism* are associated with the foundation of postcolonial studies as an academic discipline.

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In today's lecture, we are going to carry forward with this discussion. Now in this book *Orientalism*, which was first published in 1978 and here you can see the cover of the first edition of the book, Said's main argument is that European colonial domination of the Orient was integrally associated with how the Orient was conceptualised, researched and talked about in Europe.

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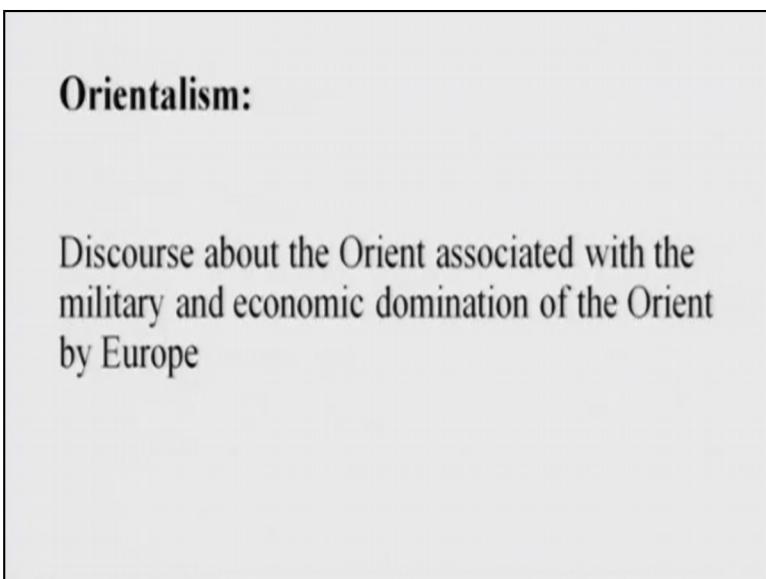
Orientalism

First published in 1978

In other words, what Said is saying in this book is that the military and economic domination of the Orient was tied up with the discourse about the Orient. And it is this discourse about the Orient that Said refers to as Orientalism. Okay.

Now, as you can see this builds upon Foucault's argument that power, knowledge, and discursive manifestation of knowledge are integrally related with each other. But what Said is doing here is that he is taking this generalised concept that we find in Foucault and he's applying it to the specific context of European colonial domination of the Orient. So let me repeat again, what is Orientalism?

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Orientalism, as Said defines it, means the European coloniser's discourse about the Orient which is tied up with the military and economic domination of the Orient. And this definition, which you can see on the slide, is a rough and ready definition of Orientalism. And in today's

lecture, we will try to elaborate on this particular definition to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the concept of Orientalism.

So let us start by looking at the term Orientalism. This term derives from the root word “orient” and its derivatives like “oriental” or “orientalist”, and broadly all of these terms refer to the East or to things related to the East. But the question here, of course, is that East of what? Well, the reference point here is Europe and the Orient signifies a land that lies East of Europe.



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Which means, more specifically, the Orient or the East refers to the land that we now know as the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent.

This Orient or the East is contrasted with the Occident or the West which in turn refers to Europe. And together, the Orient and the Occident or the East and the West form a conceptual binary. A conceptual binary that informs various texts including a text like Rudyard Kipling's “The Ballad of East and West” and in “The Ballad of East and West” he writes, very famously, “East is East and West is West, and never shall the twain meet”.

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**“East is East and West is West, and never
shall the twain meet”**

The Ballad of East and West
Rudyard Kipling

So in this line you can see how, East and West, Orient and Occident, they are used as a binary pair. Such use of East and West or Orient and Occident as contrasting conceptual categories also occur regularly in more mundane conversations where terms like East and West or Orient and Occident are used as cryptic shorthand way to denote not just geographical spaces but also certain cultural values. And cultural values that include things like food habits, for instance, dress codes, bodily postures, or even moral conduct. In these instances, the Orient and the Occident offer a kind of matrix to conceptualise the world by dividing it into two broad mutually exclusive categories where whatever is represented by the Occident the exact opposite is represented by the Orient.

So according to Said, this particular style of thinking, this particular way of thinking is a vital aspect of what constitutes Orientalism or the discourse about the Orient. But it is only one aspect. Because along with this one, Said also talks about two other aspects which together form the notion of Orientalism.

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Three Aspects of Orientalism

- Orientalism is a particular way of thinking
- Orientalism is an academic discipline
- Orientalism is a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient

And here in this slide you can see the three broad aspects of Orientalism that Said talks about. So the first aspect is that Orientalism is a way of thought or a style of thought that is pivoted on contrasting the Orient from the Occident. The second is that Orientalism is an academic discipline. And the third is Orientalism is a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient. And, we will be taking up each of these three aspects one by one in today's lecture. And let us begin with the first one.

According to Said, instances of Orientalism as a binary way of thinking can be traced as far back as say the Greek tragedies of the 5th century BCE where the Orient was imagined not just as a land of Asia but as the “other” of the European “self”. That is to say whatever Europe stood for, the Orient, as a foil, stood for exactly the opposite things. If the Occident or Europe stood for masculinity, for instance, then the Orient by contrast assumed a feminine entity in this imaginative geography. If, for instance, the Occident represented mature adulthood then by contrast the Orient became representative of childish immaturity. If the Occident considered itself to be at the pinnacle of civilisation, then of course by contrast, Orient came to represent the depths of barbarism and moral and cultural depravity. So, in other words, the discourse of Orientalism presents the Orient as this dark and unregenerate counterpart of the Occident which is simultaneously foreign, loathsome and yet excitingly exotic. As I have just told you, such a discourse which uses this binary way of thinking and which presents Orient as a sinister yet alluring entity for the West, for Europe, has been prevalent in Europe for more than a millennia. But during the heydays of European

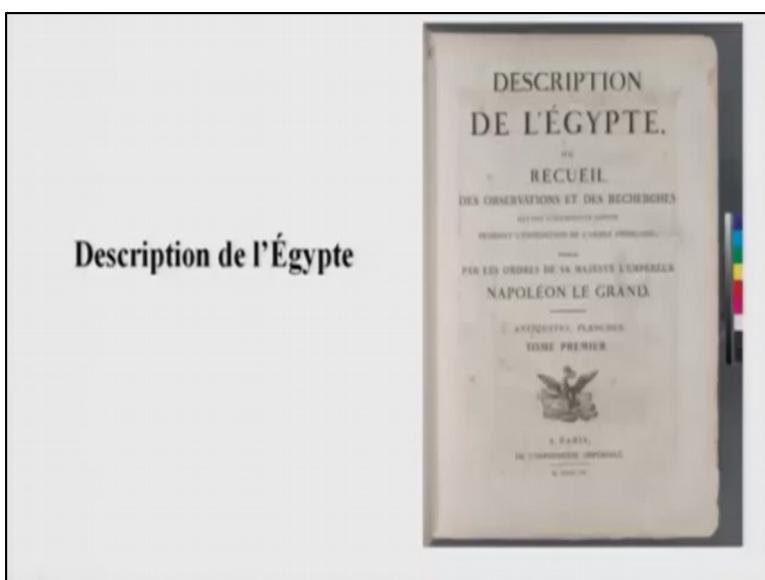
colonialism, this discourse enjoyed special relevance and it mutated itself into an academic discipline.

And therefore, here we come to the second aspect of Said's definition of Orientalism. According to Said, it was precisely when European powers started militarily conquering the Orient during the late 18th century, Orientalism emerged in Europe as an academic discipline. So there is an inherent connection, according to Said, between the military conquest of the Orient which started roughly from the late 18th century onwards and the emergence of Orientalism as an academic discipline in Europe.

Till before 17th century European access, or in fact, till before 18th century European access to the Orient was limited but military conquests during the latter half of the 18th century allowed European scholars to scrutinise the Orient more closely. Thus, as Said points out, when in 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte led a military expedition to Egypt, he was accompanied not merely by an army of soldiers but also by an army of scholars and scientists who transformed the occupied territory into an object of enquiry and a field of systematic knowledge.

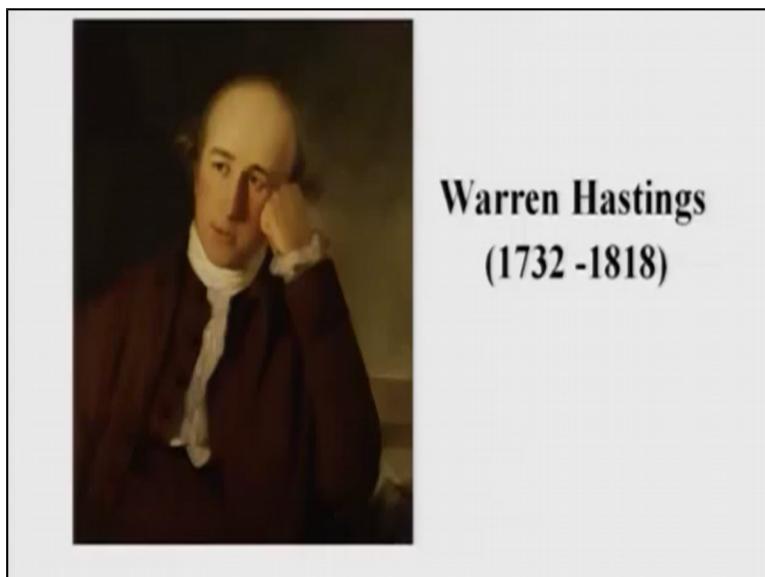
After the Napoleonic conquest, Egypt, at least for Europe, seized to remain just a distant exotic land known primarily through hearsays, but it became one of its objects of scientific enquiry. And this systematic enquiry of Egypt resulted in a multivolume Encyclopaedia called, and here you can see in the slide:

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So it was called *Description de l'Egypte*. And this particular encyclopaedia contained texts on natural histories, on descriptions of Egyptian antiquities, for instance, but also contained engravings and detailed maps of that region. So Egypt was no longer this unknown dark sinister exotic land. Right. It became an object of enquiry. It became a site of systematic knowledge. Right. And such an exercise to systematically know the conquered country is also visible in the efforts of someone like Warren Hastings, for instance, who was the first Governor General of India.

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And the dates of Warren Hastings are 1732 to 1818. And, therefore, again his tenure in India was late 18th century. So the dates more or less coincide with Napoleonic conquest of Egypt. Right. And here again we see a similar approach to transform the conquered country into a field of systematic knowledge gathering. So Hastings, along with two other colonial officials William Jones and Nathaniel Halhed, researched, compiled, and published voluminously on various aspects related to India.

And these publications were on topics as diverse as law, literature, astrology, botany, history, language. So this kind of systematic knowledge gathering which was made possible, largely because of the military conquest and control of the Orient, inaugurated during the 19th century academic fields like Egyptology, academic fields like Indology, all of which were part of the broader umbrella called Oriental studies. And Oriental studies, by the end of the 19th century, had become an integral part of the Western academia.

So the huge amount of documents that this academic Orientalism produced was soon acknowledged in Europe as the most authentic way of knowing about the Orient. So much so that someone like the British philosopher James Mill could justify writing a multivolume history of India just by consulting the available documents on India that were available in England without ever visiting India, without ever living there, without ever knowing a single Indian language. This is what Mill writes in the preface to his history of British India justifying his position:

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“This writer [...] has never been in India; and, if he has any, has a very slight, and elementary acquaintance, with any of the languages of the East. [...] [Yet] it appeared to me, that a sufficient stock of information was now collected in the languages of Europe, to enable the inquirer to ascertain every important point, in the history of India.”

Preface, Volume I, *The History of British India*

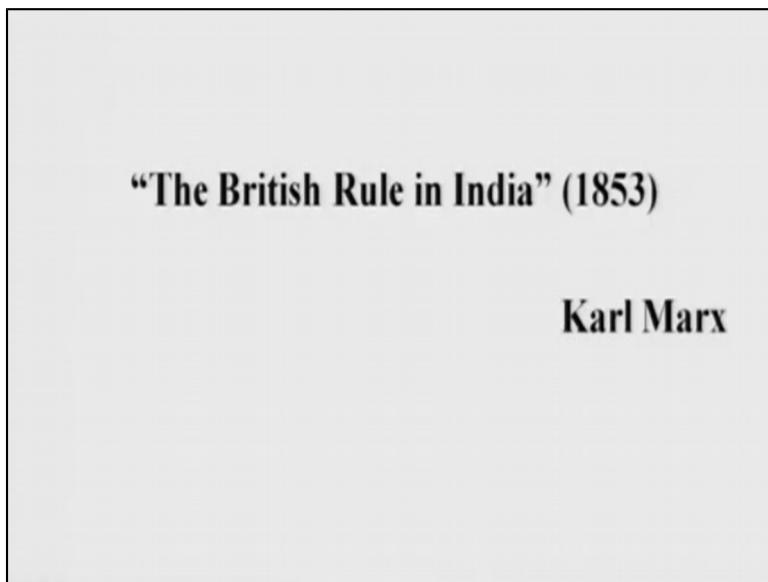
“This writer,” and here Mill is referring to himself, “has never been in India; and has a very slight, and elementary acquaintance, with any of the languages of the East. Yet it appeared to me, that a sufficient stock of information was now collected in the languages of Europe, to enable the inquirer to ascertain every important point, in the history of India.”

So if we think about it, the very audacity of this claim to know all the important points about the history of India without ever living there or without ever knowing any Indian languages is mind-boggling. Yet such claims to knowledge about the Orient was to become commonplace during the late 18th and 19th century. And indeed, in this regard, James Mill’s History of British India, whose first volume was published in 1870, can be very well clubbed together with Thomas Babington Macaulay’s 1835 Minutes upon Indian Education which, if you remember, dismissed the whole tradition of Indian or rather Sanskrit and Arabic literature without knowing any of these languages.

So it is important here to note that the rise of Orientalism as an academic discipline during the late 18th and during the 19th century did not mean that the earlier form of Orientalism

completely disappeared. The style of thinking about the Orient as a dark, backward, sinister and barbaric other of the Occident continued to underline the new form of academic Orientalism and it informed whatever systematic enquiry was going on about the Orient. Let us take an example. For instance, if we look at this article.

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The name of the article is “The British rule in India”. It was published in 1853 and it was written by Karl Marx. We will see that in this article, Marx, in spite of being aware of the havoc that British colonialism wreaked in India by destroying its traditional, economic, and social structures considered this British rule to be a boon in disguise. Why? Because in Marx’s analysis, the exploitative colonial situation, I mean, Marx’s own understanding of this exploitative colonial situation was underlined at the same time by the millennia-old prejudice that the Orient represents a backward and barbaric society.

And though as a result of the British rule Indians were “thrown into a sea of woes”, (these are Marx’s words) and though they “lost their ancient forms of civilisation” and even “hereditary means of sustenance”, what was actually lost was ultimately, according to Marx, barbaric and unregenerate customs and ways of living. So though the British colonisers inflicted this destruction they were also, according to Marx, ushering in a much needed social revolution.

And at the end of the day, Marx justified the British rule as a much needed social revolution because he believed that the British who brought about these changes were ultimately representatives of a superior civilisation. So therefore, for Marx, even the most blatant forms

of economic exploitation which characterised colonialism, and he was more than aware of those economic exploitations, but even those economic exploitations became excusable because the exploiters belonged to the Occident and the exploited were the Orientals. Of course, these millennia-old prejudices about the Orient not only informed academic writings but they also formed the basis of literary texts that made the Orient its subject, and therefore in Edward Said's study of the new form of Orientalism that emerged during the 18th and 19th-century we find that the names of literary writers like Lord Byron, for instance, or Gerard de Nerval or Gustave Flaubert occurring almost as frequently as the names of James Mill, Thomas Macaulay and Karl Marx.

But here, at this point, I think it is important to ask that why was it that such prejudices, such myths and such half-baked research conducted by people who haven't even seen the place they were writing about, how were these texts so prevalent during the late 18th and 19th century? Now this question is, of course, very easily understood and explained if we go back to the insight of Michel Foucault who, if you remember, pointed out that the discourse that is generated, circulated and ratified by the institutions of the powerful is the discourse which gains acceptance as the truth.

Similarly, after the European conquest of the Orient in the 18th-century it was the discourse of Orientalism which was validated and circulated by the institutions of the Occident and therefore the discourse of Orientalism, with all its prejudices, with all its problematic research methodology, it was this discourse that gained acceptance and validity as the truth, the authentic truth, about the Orient.

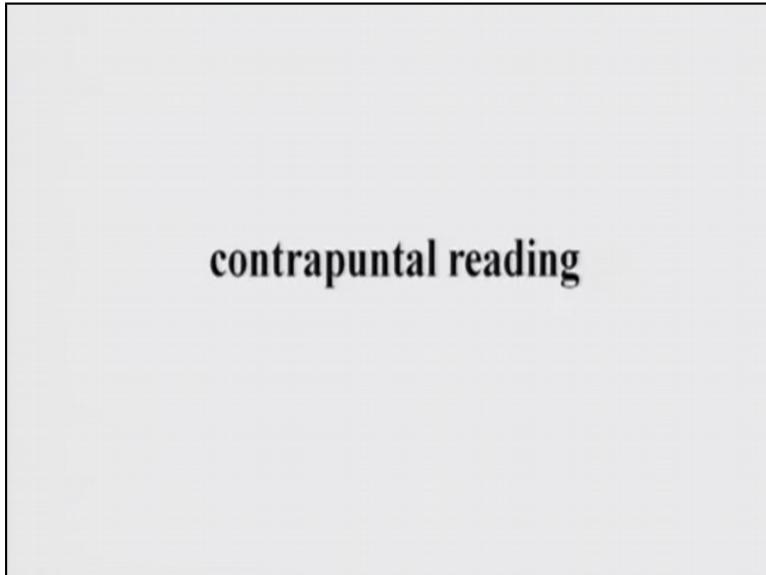
Now, these various institutions, which included the colonial legislature and judiciary, which included the schools, colleges and universities set up in the colonised parts of the world to propagate Western learning, which included the learned societies like Institut d'Egypte or the Asiatic society, these institutions together, they form what Edward Said identifies as the third aspect of Orientalism. So these were the institutes which connected colonial power with colonial knowledge.

On the one hand, as institutes representing the authority of the colonising people, it ratified the biased views and partial researchers as the truth about the Orient, and on the other hand it enabled the colonial power to justify its rule over the Orient by using the myths of

Orientalism. Thus, when the institutionally ratified discourse identified the Occident as the seat of civilisation and the Orient as the den of barbaric customs and vile rituals it started making eminent sense that European powers should have control over the Orient not simply because it was economically profitable to them but also because it was the morally right thing to do. In other words, it was precisely this institutional framework which supported the discourse of Orientalism that repackaged the profit making motives of European colonialism into a civilising enterprise.

So here it is important, I mean one point is very important, and you should take note of it. And that point is that though Said's *Orientalism* beautifully unfolds the power knowledge nexus that connects the discourse of Orientalism with the military and economic domination of the Orient by Europe, Said's main purpose in this book is not just to reveal this connection but to disrupt it. And the way in which Said seeks to bring about this disruption is through what he calls contrapuntal reading, contrapuntal reading of the texts that use the discourse of Orientalism.

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contrapuntal reading

So what is this contrapuntal reading? Well contrapuntal reading is an attempt to read the Orientalist texts against the grain. In other words, against the way in which its author intends it to be read. And how do you do it? For instance, this is done by questioning the inherent assumptions that underline a particular text. For instance, if you question the basic assumption that Orient is civilizationally backward then we will see that Marx's arguments in

his essay about the British rule in India, his arguments in favour of the British rule in India, immediately breaks down because they are premised on the fact that Orient is backward and therefore the British rule in India is ultimately beneficial for them. So if you question that basic assumption then that argument unravels and falls flat. So the intention of contrapuntal reading is to question the Europe centric values of the coloniser's texts and to point out and critique the myths and prejudices that underline them.

In our next lecture we will make use of this technique of contrapuntal reading when we discuss Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #05
Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Hello and welcome to another lecture on postcolonial literature. Now, in our previous meeting, if you remember, we discussed how the military and economic processes of colonialism is integrally associated with a peculiar kind of discourse, which we refer to as the colonial discourse. And we also studied Orientalism as an example of this colonial discourse and saw, how through the discourse of Orientalism, places like Egypt, places like India, were transformed into passive objects of knowledge for the European coloniser.

And we also saw the use of colonial discourse to justify the process of colonialism. So a colonial discourse like Orientalism for instance, which constructs the Arabs and the Indians as barbaric, ignorant, and childlike creatures presents European colonialism as a civilising mission rather than an exploitative economic enterprise. And the argument is actually very clear here.

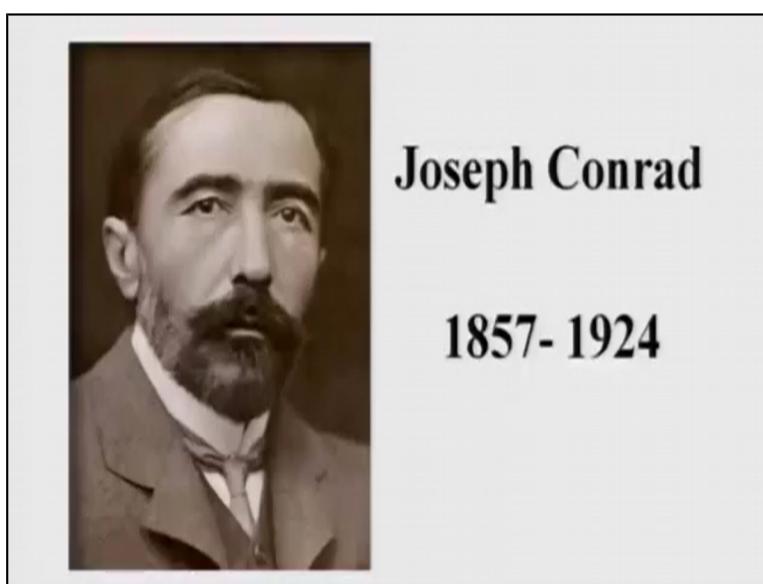
The argument that a colonial discourse makes is that colonialism, by exposing these less civilised people like the Arabs for instance or the Indians to the more civilised Europeans, actually benefit them more. Because they get enlightened than they benefit the Europeans. So it is ultimately colonialism, according to the colonial discourse, is ultimately beneficial to the colonised subjects.

And so therefore, I mean in other words, through colonialism the adult and civilised European is seen as leading the childlike Oriental natives to civilizational maturity. Now however, at this point it is important to note that Orientalism was not the only instance of colonial discourse. It was one example and if you look at the European colonialism of Africa for instance that carved up that entire continent into colonies for European countries like Britain for instance, France, Belgium, Germany, etcetera, during the late 19th century, we encounter another instance of colonial discourse associated with this process. And this discourse of course has its focus on Africa. And though it is distinct from Orientalism, the underlying logic is very similar. And it is similar because in the colonial discourse on Africa,

Africans are presented as barbaric, as childlike, who need the guidance of enlightened Europeans to reach civilizational maturity.

So, in other words, the late 19th-century European colonialism of Africa, just like the European colonisation of the Orient before that, was explained away as a civilising mission which was more beneficial again to the colonised than to the coloniser. So in today's lecture, we are basically going to talk about this colonial discourse which had its focus on Africa and the bizarre ways in which it twisted the colonial reality. And we are going to talk about this with reference to one of the classics of British fiction.

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The name of the novel that we are going to deal with today is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. But before we move on to the novel, let me introduce you to the novelist Joseph Conrad. And here in this slide, you can see his image and you can also see his dates.

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Conrad was born in 1857 in present day Ukraine in a family of Polish aristocrats, landed gentry. He died in 1924. And you know if you read about Conrad's life, it is very interesting to note that though Conrad later went on to become a very celebrated English novelist, he only learnt English in his 20's. So he did not know the English language before that. And it was in 1886 that Conrad took British citizenship.

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- Conrad took British citizenship in 1886
- Conrad's first novel *Almayer's Folly* was published in 1895

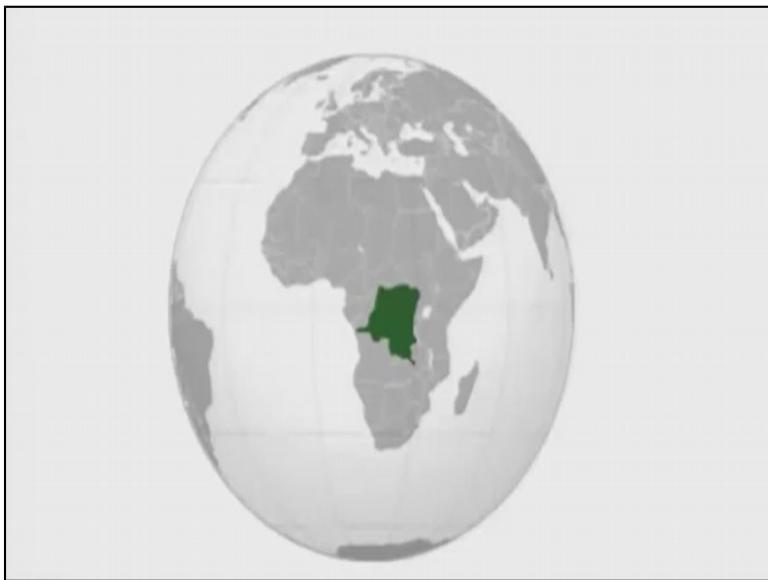
And his first novel written in English was published as late as 1895. And the name of that novel was *Almayer's Folly*. Following the publication of *Almayer's Folly* in 1895, Conrad went on to publish other powerful tales like *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, *Heart of Darkness* - which we are going to discuss today, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo*.

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- *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897)
- *Heart of Darkness* (1899)
- *Lord Jim* (1900)
- *Nostromo* (1904)

And in this slide you can see the dates of their publication given within parentheses. And in many of these fictions, that I have referred to just now, Conrad's acquaintance with the sea and with distant lands as a professional sailor - Conrad was a professional sailor, at one point of time, in his career - is prominently reflected in most of these novels. And, in fact, the novel

Heart of Darkness, which we are going to discuss today, also had its origin in one of Conrad's journeys as a sailor. So in 1890 Conrad sailed for the Congo region in west Africa.
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And Congo region is this shaded region here roughly. This actually, this map is of a present day country called the Democratic Republic of Congo. But roughly this is the Congo region. So Conrad, in 1890, went to this region. And he went on behalf of a Belgian company because he was commissioned by that company to take charge as captain of one of the company's steamers that plied along the Congo river.

King Leopold II, the ruler of Belgium at that point of time had recently annexed large portions of the Congo basin as Belgian colony. He had done that in 1870's, to be precise. And when Conrad visited the area in 1890, it had already become infamous as a site of inhuman Colonial brutalities and exploitation. And *Heart of Darkness*, on the one hand is a documentation of these European brutalities meted out to the local African populations and on the other hand, it is a meditation on the gap between this brutal physical reality of the colonial process and the colonial discourse generated from within the metropolis which presented this process as a civilising mission. So, it is a meditation on the gap between the discourse which presents colonialism as a civilising mission and the brutal reality of the colonial process.

One can follow this gap between the colonial discourse and the colonial process in Conrad's novel by focusing on the title of the novel *Heart of Darkness*. So in the novel, the character

Marlow is a very important character, is commissioned by a Belgian company to journey to Congo. And here Marlow reflects Conrad's own journey to a certain extent. And Marlow is supposed to go there, take charge of a boat that plied along the Congo river and he was also supposed to locate a somewhat mysterious person called Kurtz. K U R T Z. I encourage you to read the novel because then these names will be more familiar and the incidents that I am talking about will be more familiar. So Kurtz is a character who is only gradually represented to the reader and this gradual unfolding of the character of Kurtz is really what the story of the novel is all about.

But what is known at the very outset is that Kurtz is a European agent who works for the same Belgium company which hired Marlow and he is located deep within Africa, deep within this Congo region. So at one level, it is Marlow's journey to the depth of Africa, which is signified as a journey to the Heart of Darkness. The heart of darkness of the title actually signifies, at one level, this journey of Marlow to the heart of Africa. But what is the connection between Africa and darkness? Well Africa in colonial discourse was frequently referred to as the dark continent. And this darkness has actually nothing to do with lack of sunlight in Africa. Africa gets plenty of sun. This darkness actually is a reference to lack of knowledge about Africa. So, for Europeans, the interior of Africa remained an uncharted and unmapped territory well into the 20th century.

And therefore, in European maps, which represented for the Europeans the known world, the continent of Africa remained a blank space. And because it remained a blank, unmapped, unknown space, it was referred to as the dark continent.

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But within the European colonial discourse on Africa, the contrast between darkness and light also signified a moral opposition. And this is something very important that you need to understand. So Africa was dark because it was considered as barbaric, primitive, and childish, which was unable to distinguish between what was morally good and what was evil. And Europe in contrast represented the forces of light, of knowledge, of civilisation, because it was perceived as progressive and as mature. And it was also considered as a force, as a power, which was dedicated to the mission of bringing enlightenment, the light of civilisation, to the colonised subjects in Africa.

And, it is this light and darkness binary of the colonial discourse that Conrad puts to test in his novel *Heart of Darkness*. So what happens in the novel after Marlow journeys to Africa? Well, when Marlow lands in Africa, his first port of call is referred to as the Outer Station. And during the course of the novel Marlow will move across many such stations bearing very generic names like Outer Station, Central Station, and Inner Station. What are these stations? What do they represent?

Well they are actually sites of interaction, sites of European settlement, sites of European colonial activity. And therefore they are sites of interaction between the European colonisers and the colonised natives of Africa. And following the logic of the colonial discourse, they are also sites of progress and of civilisation. Right? Yet, the reality which confronts Marlow in these stations is radically different.

So, for instance, in the outer station segment of the novel Marlow witnesses an attempt, to build a railway track. Now the reference to railway is important because if anything was ever touted as a sign of progress and civilisation that European colonisers brought to the colonised parts of the world it was railways. It still is, in fact. The apologists of colonialism still refer to railway tracks in India, for instance, as the boon of colonialism. However, in Conrad's novel, this notion of progress and development, that the railways signified within the colonial discourse is undercut in two major ways.

Firstly, while Marlow witnesses the attempt to construct a railway project it does not appear to him as a project that will bring progress in any way. Rather it appears to him as an enormous folly. So Marlow, for instance, finds that machineries and rail tracks have been brought from Europe and a lot of blasting of cliffs and the nearby landscape was taking place but Marlow could not see any visible sign of progress.

The machineries that he witnessed were evidently decaying and the railway tracks, as soon as they were being laid, were being consumed by the forests of Africa. Clearly the very attempt to build a railway is perceived by Marlow as a futile project because it neglects the immediate context. Railways, like much of the other things that the coloniser brought with him to the parts of the world that they colonised, tried to replicate the notions of progress as developed in Europe and implement that on to lands which were geographically, socially, culturally very different. And the railways in Congo suffers from this lack of context. It is a European thing that has been forcefully replicated in an African landscape. And because of this, the railways,

rather than becoming a symbol of progress in the novel, becomes a symbol of an alien endeavour which represents a certain kind of foolhardiness. The novel also undermines the project of railway building and its association with progress by questioning about the beneficiaries of this so-called progress.

So when we talk about the European colonialism ushering in progress and development in the colonised parts of the world, it is always important to ask the question - progress for whom? As Marlow realises, if the railways being built in Congo was supposed to bring civilisation and progress to the native population of Africa, then that was proving to be a signal failure. Why? Because the project, rather than elevating the positions of Africans, rather than ennobling them, had actually, as Marlow witnessed, had actually transformed them into bonded labourers, who were toiling to complete a foolhardy work that was thrust on them by the colonising outsiders. The Africans, in fact, that Marlow observes near the railway site in the Outer Station are found tiding chains, walking desolately with basket full of earth on their heads. This is what the promise of colonial progress achieves in Africa, it tears the native population from their own social and cultural fabric and converts them into chained groups. Now, at this point, it is important to take note of one of the narrative techniques that Conrad uses in this novel to tell the tale of European colonialism of Africa.

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Delayed Decoding

And this technique is best understood as a delayed decoding of the external reality. So, while narrating his experiences in Africa, Marlow tells of how he perceived the reality that

surrounded him through his sense organs and it is only after a delay, that Marlow, as well as the reader, actually gets to understand what these sense impressions actually mean. To understand this technique, let us consider these lines from the novel, where Marlow is describing his experience in the Outer Station where the work for the railways is going on.

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Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

“Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place, where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.”

Now, the first line presents a bizarre landscape of black shapes which confronts Marlow's eyes even while his other sense organs are overwhelmed by the constant blasting that is taking place for the railways. But, it is not until the last line, the line - “and this is the place, that some of the helpers had withdrawn to die” - do we actually grasp the meaning of the black shapes? Those bizarre shapes, leaning and clinging in pain and abandonment, we realise, Marlow realises, are nothing but emaciated and dying Africans, African workers, who are the apparent beneficiaries of European colonial progress.

So this slight delay in decoding the reality experienced by Marlow is actually indicative of how the truth of colonial discourse is disjointed from the colonial reality. Marlow takes time to grasp what is happening around him, precisely because, as a European, fed on the myth of

colonialism as a civilising mission, he finds it difficult to make sense of a reality that is so far removed from any trace of civilised behaviour and of progress.

Now, this disparity between a discourse which presents colonialism as a civilising mission, and the colonial reality is, however, most powerfully represented through Marlow's discovery of the character called Kurtz. But before Marlow even gets to meet Kurtz in person he hears about him. He hears him being praised as a prodigy, as a superior being who really personifies all the civilizational virtues of Europe. So he is presented as this iconic European. And Kurtz is also praised for being one of the most efficient agents who can procure an astonishing amount of ivory from the interiors of Africa to be shipped to Europe.

And ivory, of course, was one of the most prized resources that European colonisers extracted from the Congo region for their domestic consumption. Now, when Marlow finally gets to meet Kurtz in the Inner Station, he is again confronted with the reality that is radically different from the discourse about Kurtz. And it is so radically different that he finds it difficult to make sense of the reality that he encounters when he actually meets Kurtz or goes to the Inner Station where Kurtz is located.

Here again there is a masterful use of the technique of delayed decoding. Thus, when Marlow sees Kurtz's house by the river for the first time and by now Marlow has journeyed from Outer Station through Central Station to Inner Station where he finds Kurtz's house, and he first sees it through his binoculars. And he is immediately struck by the number of poles, wooden poles surrounding the house with what appeared to be ornamental knobs on the top.

It is only after a substantial delay and careful observation that Marlow realises that these knobs are something more sinister than merely ornamental woodwork. With mounting horror Marlow recognises them as dried and shrunken heads of Africans which Kurtz had severed from the bodies of the native villages to spread terror among the local population. This horrible exercise was in fact how Kurtz compelled the locals to hunt for ivory on his behalf. This was in fact the secret of his efficiency as a colonial agent.

At this point in the novel, the title *Heart of Darkness* assumes a new and altered significance. Darkness seizes to be a qualification of Africa and Africans and becomes associated with the iconic European figure of Kurtz and the process of colonial extraction of resources that Kurtz

represents. Thus Conrad's novel really turns, what it actually does here is it really turns the colonial discourse on its head and explodes the myth of civilising mission by placing it against the brutal realities of colonialism.

And seen from this perspective, *Heart of Darkness* appears to be Conrad's contrapuntal reading of the colonial discourse. So, as discussed in our previous lecture, you will know that a contrapuntal reading attempts to read a discourse against the grain, against the ideological bias that underlines a particular discourse, so as to bring out its fault lines. And this is precisely what *Heart of Darkness* does with the colonial discourse.

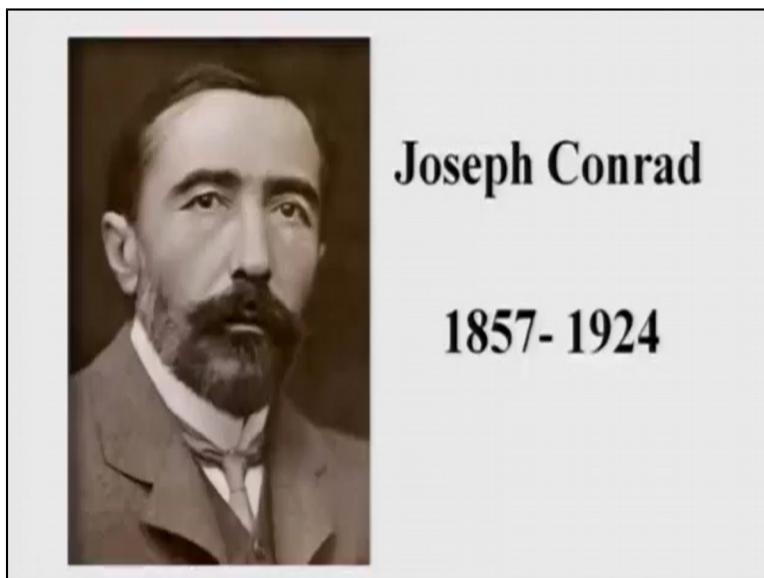
It brings out the biases, the contradictions, and the falsehood that underlines it. But, at this point, we come across another question: can we also read the novel *Heart of Darkness* contrapuntally? After all the novel, in spite of its anti-European orientation, is itself a product of European metropolitan culture. And this is an important question that we will take up in our next lecture. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #06
Colonialism: The African Perspective

Welcome again to this series of lectures on postcolonial literature.

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Now, in our previous lecture, we discussed Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* and how that novel provides a contrapuntal reading of the colonial discourse on Africa. But we ended our previous lecture with a very important question. And the question was - can there be a contrapuntal reading of the novel itself? Can there be a contrapuntal reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the text?

Now, you will have to understand here that, in spite of the sharp criticism of the colonial discourse which was emanating from the West and the kind of sharp criticism of that discourse that we find in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, we will have to remember that Joseph Conrad himself was finally a Western author who was situated in England, which was one of the biggest colonial metropolis of the last century.

And his novel *Heart of Darkness*, in spite of its criticism, was itself published by a publisher situated in the metropolis. And, in spite again of all its criticism of the West, its primary

readership was a western audience, was people located in the colonial metropolis. So on the one hand, we have *Heart of Darkness* as a very sharp and incisive criticism of western ideologies and on the other hand, we find that this criticism too is emanating from the same centre which is also forging the colonial discourse.

Therefore, the question is, is it not possible that *Heart of Darkness*, though it is critical of the metropolitan colonial discourse, is not radically separated from the bias and the prejudices of the metropolitan societies which were based on colonial exploitation? The answer to this question, as we shall see during the course of this lecture, is a big YES. Indeed, Conrad and his novel *Heart of Darkness* can be found sharing certain important ideological premises with the colonial discourse, in spite of its criticism of the colonial enterprise.

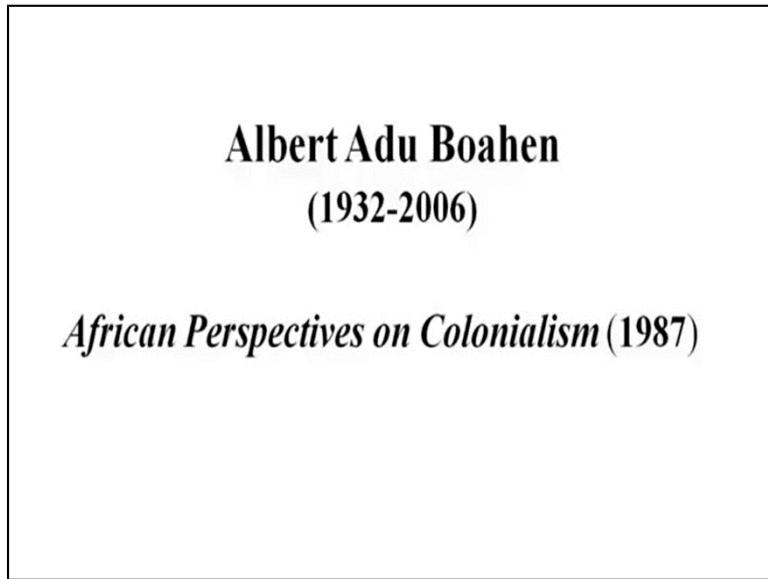
And this becomes evident if you try and read the novel contrapuntally. Or, in other words, if we try and read the novel from a perspective from which its novelist, from which the novelist Joseph Conrad never intended it to be read. So what can this other perspective be? What can this alternative perspective be? Well, it is a perspective of the colonised Africans. A perspective, that is, as again, we will see during the course of our lectures, following lectures, that this perspective, the perspective of the colonised Africans is crucially lacking in the novel.

And, therefore, this can give us that alternative perspective from which we can have a contrapuntal reading of the novel itself. Because the novel was never meant to be read, at least by Joseph Conrad, by the colonised Africans. You will of course remember that all we get, if you read the novel carefully, you will see that there is a lot of talk about oppression in Africa, there is a lot of sympathy even for the Africans who are oppressed but all we get to hear about Africa is ultimately the voice of Marlow. And, we cannot forget that Marlow, in spite of all his dislike for how colonialism was operating in the Congo region, was himself working there as an agent of the Belgian colonial authority.

Therefore, if you read the novel from a genuine African perspective rather than from the perspective of a Westerner, who was sympathetic, we might arrive at a contrapuntal understanding of the novel and how it is itself informed by the very same prejudices that also informs the colonial discourse on Africa. But before trying to read the novel from this African perspective, we first need to better acquaint ourselves with some major points in African

history. And not only the history of colonial rule in Africa but also the history of precolonial Africa.

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And for this, I turn to this wonderful book titled *African Perspectives on Colonialism* which was written by the Ghanaian academician and political leader Albert Adu Boahen. And the reason I choose this book is not only because of the quality of scholarship that is there to be found in this book but also because it is short and really very easily readable. So if you manage to get your hands on this book, I would definitely encourage you to read this book in its entirety. Now coming back to the African historical context, one of the most important dates which will help us explore this African context, both colonial and precolonial history, is the date 15th of November 1884.

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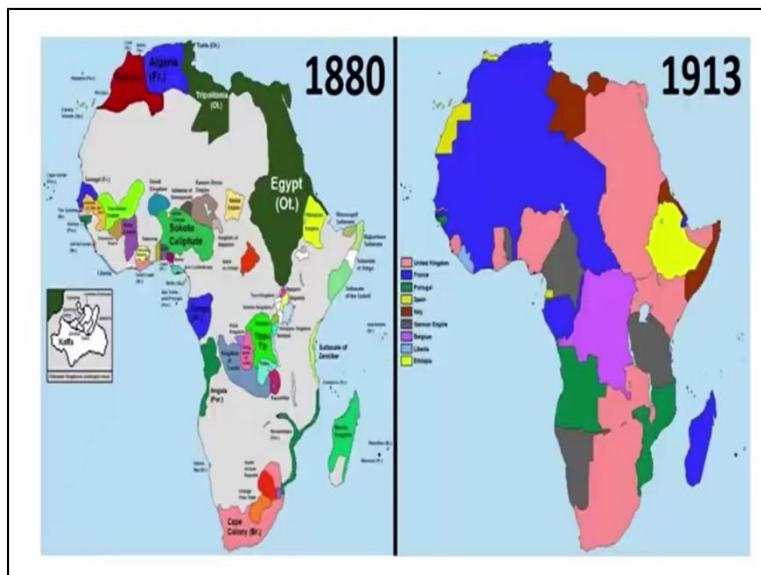


Berlin Conference on Africa

(1884/1885)

And what happened on this date? Well on this date a conference started in Berlin, Germany and this conference was organised to decide the fate of the Africans and their territories. And it lasted till the 31st of January 1885. Now the decisions that were taken during these few months of the conference were so momentous that it changed the political geography of the entire African continent forever.

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And to get an idea about how big this change was, let us look at these two maps. So on the left side, the map on the left side, which shows how Africa looked politically just a few years before the Berlin conference, you can see that most of the continent is divided into small tribal kingdoms. Barring the large green patch here, at the top, which of course is a part of the Ottoman Empire and the blue portion here, at the top marked Algeria, which was a French

colony. Apart from this, if you look down near the south of the continent, you can see a pink portion marked Cape Colony and this was the colony of the British. Now look at the map on the right and the date. Both these maps, they have the dates on top of them.

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So the first map is how Africa looked in 1880 and the second map gives you the date 1913. And if you compare the first map with the second map, the difference is really startling because as you can see here, most of Africa, is now in 1913, divided into large chunks of territories. And each of these large chunks of colour patches, each of them represent the colony of one or the other European power. So, for instance, the large blue patch which starts from the north where Algeria is located and which continues down almost to the centre of the continent, represents the French colony in Africa.

The pink patches throughout the continent, they represent the British colonies in Africa. And, of course, this portion marked in violet is the Congo region which was the Belgian colony in Africa. And this is the place where Conrad situates his *Heart of Darkness*. So and apart from two areas, one marked in yellow here in the East of Africa - so apart from these two areas, one here, which represents the Kingdom of Ethiopia and the other one here which is marked in a light blue which represents Liberia - apart from these two regions, the whole of Africa, by 1913, was neatly parcelled out as colonies of various European powers. Now the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, in which this decision to parcel out this entire continent was taken, was attended by almost all the major western countries except America and Switzerland.

But what is more important to note here is and this is very ironic that in this conference, which decided the fate of the African continent for decades to come, not a single African representative was present. So no single African person was present during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Now I am sure that such a situation today hits us as absurd. How can you decide the fate of an entire continent without any representative from that continent being there?

But I mean yes it is absurd, there is no denying that fact, but it is also, this fact also gives us a very important clue about how colonialism operates. We repeatedly refer to colonialism as a form of exploitation and oppression precisely because it does not enter into any form of consultation with the people whose resources and labour it uses to sustain its profit making enterprises. Thus within colonialism the colonised subjects are always left without a voice.

Now, as far as the Berlin conference was concerned, we also need to keep in mind that, though it decided the fate of Africa and its inhabitants, the conference was never really motivated by any special concern about Africans. Rather, what the conference sought to achieve was a balance of power in Europe and a resolution of what is known as the scramble for Africa that had broken out in the 1880's.

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Scramble for Africa

And this scramble for Africa is an important term for us, which will help us understand the African context better. And in order to explore these terms, scramble for Africa, we need to go behind the capitalist motives that guided the kind of colonialism that we are discussing in this course. So from the very beginning, I have been associating colonialism and colonial enterprise with capitalism. Right? So here, I would be talking briefly about this connection between capitalism and colonialism as it related to Africa, African colonialism.

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What is Capitalism?

Capitalism is the investment of money or capital to make more money i.e. profit.

So let us start by asking ourselves the basic question - what is capitalism? Now, very simply put, capitalism can be defined as investment of money or capital to make more money, that is, profit. Now, Europe had started moving from a feudal mode of economy to a capitalist mode of economy from say around the 15th century. And it was of course a very gradual progress.

And this progress towards capitalism, and this progress of capitalism has passed through various phases. And, indeed even today, capitalism is a force that is continuously renewing itself and taking newer forms. But in our discussion of the African context, the kind of capitalism that is most important is the one that is associated with the rise of the industrial mode of production. Right.

So by the 18th-century Europe had witnessed what is known as the industrial revolution whereby the capacity of various European nations to produce commodities far surpassed the capacity of these nations to consume these commodities domestically. But these surplus products, these surplus commodities, were nevertheless produced to rake in huge amounts of profit.

Now, when we are talking about profit and capitalism, I want you to note a very interesting aspect of this profit, which is, that in capitalism, the profit margin is something which is forever going down. What do I mean by this? Let us suppose that I am producing shirts in my industry. And I am selling one shirt for 100 rupees. Now in capitalism there is always competition, which means that, say tomorrow, another person might start producing the same shirt and might reduce his profit margin to 50 rupees and start selling that shirt to cut me out

of the competition. Which means that, in future, I will have to reduce my profit margin further below 50 Rupees to stay in the race. As a result, therefore, the profit margin within the capitalist mode of production, industrial mode of production, is seen to be continuously deteriorating. Now you can only sustain this ever lowering profit margin by two ways.

One way is if you can keep increasing the market for your commodity. So, in other words, if earlier you got Rs 100 profit by selling one shirt to one person, in the changed circumstances, where your profit margin has come down to 50, say for instance, in order to make that same profit you will have to sell the shirt to two persons. You will have to make two shirts and you will have to sell it to two people in order to get that profit.

If your profit margin further declines, if it goes down to say Rupee 1, then of course, you will have to find a larger market. Which means that you will have to, in order to make Rs 100 profit, you will have to sell it to 100 people. Right. So by continuously increasing the size of your market, you can still rake in the same amount of profit that you were doing earlier before the competition.

But another way, there is also another way, which is usually coupled with this first way to sustain the business, in spite of a deteriorating profit margin, and that is if you can find some way to reduce the price of raw material that goes into the making of a commodity. So, for instance, if you can somehow procure cotton at a reduced price then even if the final price of your shirt has fallen down due to competition you will still be able to make a profit.

Because ultimately, what is profit? Profit is the difference between the price of the raw material plus the labour charges that are required to make a commodity and the final selling price of the commodity. So if you can find some way to reduce the price of the raw material and the labour input, then even if your final price is coming down the difference is maintained and profit is maintained.

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Primary reasons for European colonialism of Africa:

- i. quest for a larger market to sell European commodities
- ii. search for cheap raw materials to feed the European industries

Now, according to Albert Adu Boahen, the quest for a larger market and for cheap raw materials to feed the industries were the primary causes why Africa was colonised by the West. So by the 19th-century, industrial mode of production had become the norm for most of the European countries who were as a result, because industrial mode of production had become a norm for them, they were perpetually searching for cheap raw materials as well as for a larger market for their produced goods.

This made the continent of Africa especially alluring to the European countries both for its resources, which till the 1880's had largely remained untapped by the European industries, and for its potential as a market for European commodities. Now at this point, I would like to point out that Africa, since long, had been a place from where the West had acquired slave labour for its industries. And this kept on going till slavery was banned in the West in the 1830's and the slave trade from Africa ended.

But, therefore, Europe was involved in one particular kind of trade with Africa even before 1880's - the trade of humans. Now it is important to keep in mind that during this period of slave trade the direct influence of Western powers largely remained limited to the fringes of the African continent. But during the late 1870's something new started happening.

Two countries, France and Belgium, they started showing interest in expanding their colonial influence deeper within the continent. And this expansionist agenda of France and Belgium started causing a great deal of alarm amongst other major European powers like Britain for

instance, like Portugal, like Germany. Because we will have to remember that all of them by 1870's were major industrial nations and they were therefore always in search for larger markets and cheaper raw material.

And Africa, therefore, they could not allow only two countries to colonise the entire continent, so they also moved in. And this, therefore, set out a kind of race between these Western countries, all of them, France, Belgium, Britain, Portugal, Germany, all of these countries became involved in a race to colonise Africa, from say around 1880's.

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Scramble for Africa

And this race is what is known as the Scramble for Africa. The Berlin Conference held in 1884-1885 was an attempt by the European powers to settle amicably between themselves the conflict that inevitably accompanied this competition. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising that no African representative was present there at the conference. Because the conference, as I have told you earlier, was ultimately a way to resolve the competition between European nations and the way that the conflict was resolved was by amicably cutting up Africa, the continent of Africa, between themselves and sharing the large African cake, as it were. But that is only one side of the story. Isn't it?

We also have to ask how did the Africans react to this European attempt to divide up their lands into European colonies. Well the reactions, African reactions, were of course varied. And some African kingdoms did establish alliances with various competing European forces and they did that primarily to protect themselves, safeguard themselves against other hostile African kingdoms. But though there are these stories of alliances, the overwhelming African

response to this European colonisation was of military resistance. And this resistance was met in the battlefield by advanced European military technology, in the form of things like the Gras repeater rifle, things like the Maxim gun, which the Europeans had, the Africans did not.

And this really decimated the African military that the Europeans encountered in the battlefield. And as a result, within a decade of the Berlin Conference, all major African kingdoms, except Ethiopia and Liberia, lost their independence and became European colonies. Now as we know from our earlier discussion, this military colonisation which characterises colonialism, is inevitably accompanied by a colonial discourse which transforms the bloody process of colonisation into a civilising mission wherein Africans were presented not as victims of European oppression, rather they were portrayed as immature savages and barbarians who were about to benefit from the light of civilisation that the European colonisers were bringing with them. Now this is of course very well-known to us, this is the colonial discourse as civilising mission. However, Boahen points out in his book that contrary to this colonial discourse, the Africans, who were subjugated by the Europeans, were far from being savages and barbarians.

Not only did they have a very long and rich cultural tradition, they were also thriving economically and socially till before 1880's, when the Scramble for Africa began and when their independence ended. Now, indeed by the 1870's, African kingdoms had largely shaken themselves out of the ill effects of slave trade that had plagued them till the 1830's and they had started prospering in terms of trade, for instance.

African societies were witnessing a more equitable distribution of wealth. The necessity of commerce had also started resulting in the development of infrastructure, for instance, wherein land and river routes were being linked to form large trade networks. African population was also increasing till before 1880's. And this was a sign of progress because the slave trade had considerably depleted the African population.

And of course colonialism post 1880's was again going to reverse this population trend. The population was again going to go in decline which of course points at a general impoverishment of Africa and Africans. And finally a lot of interesting experiments with constitutional politics was also going on in pre-colonial Africa, especially in places like Ghana, before the Europeans forcibly came in to claim the whole of Africa for themselves

and declaring the Africans as savages and brushing all these signs of progress and development aside. Now, in our next lecture, we will return to the novel *Heart of Darkness* but with this new awareness of the colonial and precolonial African context. And we will see how this African perspective can lead to a powerful contrapuntal reading of one of the most celebrated novels in British literature. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #07
Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (I)

Hello and welcome back to this course on postcolonial literature. Now if you remember, in our previous meeting we had tried to acquaint ourselves briefly with the colonial and precolonial African context and I had suggested in that lecture that this acquaintance will help us get a new perspective from which we will be able to produce a contrapuntal reading of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Now the most important thing that we need to remember from our previous discussion of the African context is that unlike what the contemporary colonial discourse kept repeating, Africa and Africans were not a race of barbarians who were waiting to be redeemed by the civilised Europeans who colonised their land right, that was far from the case. In fact, not only did the Africans have a long and rich cultural tradition, cultural traditions in fact, various cultural traditions are to be found in Africa today.

Not only did they have these cultural traditions, they were also thriving economically, socially, politically, they were experimenting with constitutional forms of political governance. And this was going on till the 1880's, when the European moved in and claimed the entire continent for themselves as their colonies. And by doing so reversed much of the gains that the African societies had achieved in almost every field since the abolition of the slave trade in the early 19th century.

Now if you read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, we will see that though in the text the narrator Marlow relates a story from a position that is apparently sympathetic to the colonised Africans, he never takes into account the fact that Africans too, like the Europeans who conquered them, are civilised and mature human beings. What Marlow does is therefore merely sympathise with what he thought to be the plight of poor native savages.

But he never seemed to question the problematic European coloniser's assumption that Africans were uncivilised brutes. In other words, though Marlow criticises the oppressive

practices that characterised European colonialism in Africa or in Congo more specifically, he is never really able to sort of look at the Africans that he encounters in his journey across Congo to meet Kurtz. He never seems to realise that they are, the Africans that he encounters, they are his fellow human beings and therefore they deserve the same dignity that any white man, any white skinned man, would normally command. And this line of argument that I have just stated is perhaps most forcefully put forward in the celebrated essay titled “Image of Africa” written by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe.

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Chinua Achebe

“Image of Africa” (1988)

And in today’s lecture, we will discuss Achebe’s criticism of Conrad’s novel in his essay “Image of Africa” before we move on to discuss his seminal novel titled *Things Fall Apart*. And I think that this transition from the essay to the novel would be a smooth one because Achebe’s criticism of how Conrad portrays Africa and Africans in his *Heart of Darkness* will provide us with some very important clues about how to read Achebe’s own novel *Things Fall Apart* and its depiction of African society and African people.

Now coming to the essay “Image of Africa”, the fundamental argument that Achebe makes in that essay is at the way the image of Africa was constructed by the colonising Europeans was guided by an important psychological need in them. Achebe argues that by portraying Africa and Africans as savage, uncivilised, brutish, barbaric, what the colonising Europeans were actually doing was they were creating a foil for themselves so that by contrast they could themselves appear in a positive light. And if the Africans were savages and barbarians, then by contrast the Europeans started looking like very convincingly the upholders and carriers of

the light of civilisation. So an image of Africa was constructed through the colonial discourse that was entirely negative and this, according to Achebe, help create an all positive image of Europe and Europeans.

And if you remember, when we discussed Edward Said we saw that this same negative/positive binary was also equally part of the Orientalist discourse. Now what Achebe alleges in his essay “Image of Africa” is that Conrad too, like most European writers writing about the parts of the world that was colonised by them, thought from within this negative/positive binary. In other words, Conrad’s criticism of the colonial discourse was at best a partial criticism.

Why? Because Achebe argues that in spite of his criticism, Conrad shared the most fundamental idea which informed the colonial discourse on Africa. And what was that fundamental idea? The idea was of course that Africans were lesser human beings than Europeans. So in spite of Conrad’s criticism, Achebe argues, Conrad still could not jettison this notion that Africans are lesser human beings.

And Achebe brings out this bias working within the novel *Heart of Darkness* by drawing our attention to a particular section in the novel in which Marlow, during his journey down the Congo river, looks out from his boat and sees African village life unfolding in the banks of the river. And this is how Marlow chooses to describe what he sees:

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suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? [...] we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse.

Joseph Conrad *Heart of Darkness*

suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked

grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? [...] we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse.

Now please note here that Marlow categorises the Africans that he sees from his boat as prehistoric men. And what this means is that Marlow as a European considers himself to be the representative of the modern civilised man. And it is from that apparent vantage point of superiority that Marlow classifies the Africans that he sees as prehistoric who are yet to evolve into modern human beings.

In fact, the description here doesn't even depict Africans as complete human beings, rather they are depicted as physical fragments- as black limbs, stamping feet, rolling eyes and so on. And we never get to see an African man or a woman in his or her completeness, as if an entire and complete human identity is impossible in an African. And this brings us back to the positive/negative, mature/immature, civilised/barbaric binaries which form the mainstay of the colonial discourse.

And this binary mode of thinking that the novel inherits from the colonial discourse is also apparent in the way Marlow portrays normal everyday African village life. And he does that as we have seen in this quotation, he does that as something which is characterised by the incomprehensible frenzy of a madhouse. It is a mad frenzy which provides a contrast for the sanity that Marlow as a European man supposedly represents.

Now one controversial aspect of Achebe's criticism of *Heart of Darkness* in his essay "Image of Africa" is that he ascribes the colonial bias not merely to Marlow and his narration of Africa but to Conrad himself. In fact, Achebe argues that it is Conrad's inherent racism that doesn't allow him to see and portray Africans as his fellow human beings even while he is arguing against the brutalities of colonialism. Now this argument has a problem and the problem with this argument is that it is conflating Marlow and Conrad together. So what it is doing is that it is trying to ascribe the ideological peculiarities of a fictional character, that is Marlow, on to the author Conrad himself. And here a counter argument is possible and that

counter argument is that you yourself do not need to be a racist in order to portray, in order to create a character, who shares a racist ideology.

In other words, Conrad himself need not have been a racist in order to create a character like Marlow who has a racist world view. And you remember that it is only Marlow that we hear, apart from another frame narrator who introduces Marlow on board of the ship, Nellie. And it is only Marlow's voice, apart from that narrator, first narrator, whom we meet very briefly, in the novel.

It is only Marlow's voice that we hear and it is Marlow's voice that describes Africa. And Conrad is very careful not to introduce his authorial voice into this narrative. But, having said this, I would also say that Achebe does try to make a very convincing case regarding Conrad's racism in his essay and I will leave it up to you to read the essay and decide on this issue. So I leave it as an open-ended question.

Now moving on with the essay there is one more very interesting argument that Achebe makes in his essay "Image of Africa" and I will end this discussion on the essay by referring to it. So, while revealing the deformed image of Africa and Africans that is presented in *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe places against it a radically opposed image, the image of a civilised Africa. So on the one hand he brings out how Africa is presented in Conrad's novel as an uncivilised space, as a space inhabited by savages and barbarians and he then goes on to place, create another image of Africa, which is that of a civilised Africa. And how does he do this? Well he does this, Achebe does this, by talking about how during the first decade of the 20th century, which means barely a few years after the publication of *Heart of Darkness*, the European art world was revolutionised by the advent of what is known as the Cubist movement and Cubism, as Achebe shows in turn was deeply inspired by African art especially the art of the Fang people and the masks.

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Example of a Fang mask

*African art like this
inspired the
cubist movement
in Europe*

And here in the slide you can see an example of the mask created by Fang people. The masks made by these Africans provided a new artistic idiom to such celebrated western artists like Pablo Picasso for instance, or Henri Matisse. And ironically these Fang people who inspired the most avant-garde art movement of modern Europe were residents of the very Congo region whose people are described in the novel *Heart of Darkness* as brutish inhabitants of a madhouse.

And Achebe stresses on this irony. He also points out that therefore there is this other image of Africa that is possible. An image of Africa that is civilised and not only civilised but civilised enough to deeply influence the culture of the modern western world. And Achebe's basic argument therefore is that this image of a civilised Africa is completely missing in Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*.

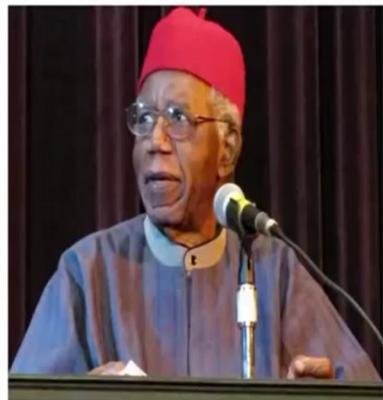
Indeed, as Achebe argues, this image of a civilised Africa is found missing, in not only merely this one novel, it is found missing in all the discourses about Africa that has originated in the west. And Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* was one of the first attempts to break this stereotypical image of a sinister and barbaric Africa, at least within the English speaking world. And it is to this novel that I will now turn.

But, before we start exploring *Things Fall Apart*, let me properly introduce to you its author Chinua Achebe

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Chinua Achebe

(1930 – 2013)



B. Shanti S. (Shanti) CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

We have been talking about Achebe and here is his image. Achebe's dates are from 1930 to 2013 and he was born in Nigeria in a tribe called the Igbo tribe. And his father was a teacher at a Christian missionary school. Achebe was himself a product of this very same school and this is an important fact to remember. Why? Because the particular kind of education to which Achebe was exposed to as a child in a missionary school gave him access to the classics of British literature.

And later on, when he would write his novels about the African people and though he was writing about Africa and Africans, his novels would be shot through, would be pervaded with references to British texts and Western classics in general. And this is evident even in *Things Fall Apart* if you just notice the title *Things Fall Apart*. The title refers to a poem, a very famous poem, titled “The Second Coming” written by William Butler Yeats and *Things Fall Apart* is a reference to a particular line in the poem. And we will have to return back to this reference later on. But now I would just like to point out that *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. A very influential novel. And it was published by a London based firm called [Heinemann](#). And this is again important because Heinemann would later on go on to publish a very influential series called the African Writers series, in which they would publish and therefore sort of circulate within the English speaking world a number of post-independence African writers. And Chinua Achebe acted as a first advisory editor of this African Writers series. And incidentally *Things Fall Apart* was also the first book to be published in that African Writers series.

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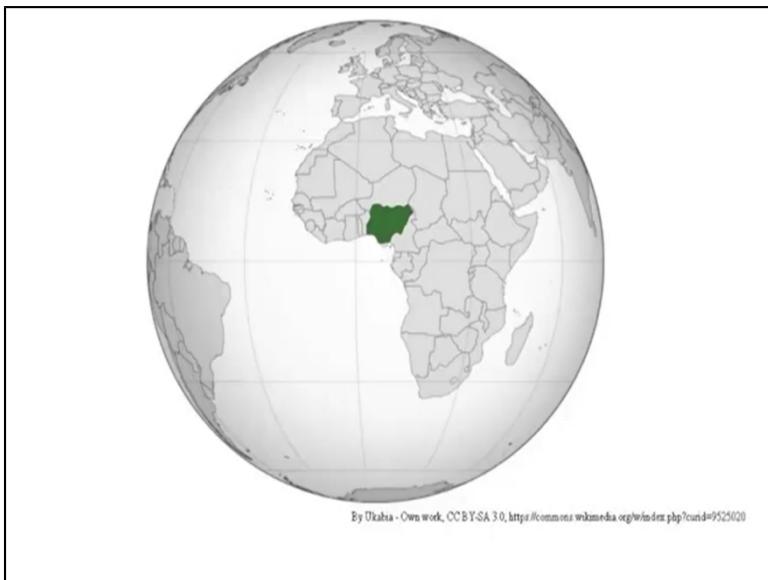
- *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
- *No Longer at Ease* (1960)
- *Arrow of God* (1964)
- *A Man of the People* (1966)
- *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)

So apart from his first novel, Achebe is also known for these other works of fiction. So *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. Then there was *No Longer at Ease*, which was published in 1960, *Arrow of God*, 1964, *A Man of the People*, published in 1966, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, which was published in 1987.

Now let us turn to the novel *Things Fall Apart* and see how it approaches the project of writing the colonial history of Africa from an African perspective and how it presents an image of a civilised Africa in contrast with the image of an uncivilised Africa that we have already encountered in the British novel *Heart of Darkness*. Now a good way to understand this project would be to go back to the scene in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlow describes from his boat the frenzied activities of the Africans in the bank. And he of course thinks of it as a madhouse that is incomprehensible to a sane man like him, a sane European like him.

Now, because Marlow is narrating this scene, we immediately situate ourselves on the boat along his side and we start looking at the scene from his perspective, which is European. But what if we switch our position? What if we look at it from an African perspective, that is to say from the bank of the river itself, where the frenzied activities are going on? Will it give us a different insight into the colonial encounter altogether?

Now Achebe's novel helps us do just that, helps us switch our position, vis-à-vis, *Heart of Darkness*, because it takes us directly inside an African village. Though this village in Achebe's novel titled or rather known as Umofia is located in Nigeria and not in Congo.
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And here you can see the shaded area represents the modern-day country of Nigeria. Now the first thing that we feel when we look from inside the African village is that even the most frenzied activities of the villagers neither looked like savagery nor does it look like incoherent madness. And the reason for this is that unlike Marlow who looks at a similar scene of the African village as an outsider, we are presented in Achebe's novel with a wholly coherent African world view and we see therefore the village activities as an insider. Thus for the first five chapters or so for instance of Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, he painstakingly details the various rituals and actions that hold a precolonial Igbo village society together. We come to know from these chapters the hierarchical structure of the Igbo village. Umuofia is an Igbo village. We come to know of its hierarchical structure.

We come to know the importance that this society attaches to physical prowess of men and how that progress is tested through regular wrestling matches between the people of the community. We also come to know of the importance of the yam crop whose harvesting cycle plays an essential role in organising the annual life of the villagers. Thus, after these five chapters when chapter six opens with a scene where three drummers are seen working feverishly on their drums and a huge gathering of people roaring and clapping, it no longer appears to us as the mass of clapping hands and stamping feet of savages that Marlow claims to have witnessed from his boat. Because Achebe's novel places this frenzy of the drummers and of the crowd in a context. And by the time we reach this scene we know that these are all part of the festivities that are associated with the harvesting of the yam. And the crowds are roaring and clapping not as mad people but rather they are cheering the wrestlers who are

about to participate in the annual wrestling match which again is associated with the yam harvest.

Now it is this insider's view which Achebe's novel provides that helps us really to break free from the bias and the prejudice of the colonial discourse about Africa and align ourselves with the African perspective. In the following lecture we will explore *Things Fall Apart* in further details, we'll look into this African perspective that the novel helps us align with. We will also talk about characters and plot structures of the novel and see how the colonial encounter looks when it is viewed from the African perspective that is presented in the novel. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #08
Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (II)

Hello and welcome back to this course on postcolonial literature. Today we will continue with our exploration of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* which we have already started discussing in our previous lecture. And if you remember, in our last meeting we talked about how Achebe's novel helps us look at the colonial encounter from an African perspective. And it does so by acquainting us with the intimate details of the life of an African village community in Nigeria.

Now compared to Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, which we did earlier and where we look at the African village life from the perspective of a European outsider, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* we are able to switch our position and become an insider to whom even the most frenzied village scenes do not look like the incomprehensible activities of a madhouse as it did to Marlow if you remember. In fact, every action fits sensibly within a coherent worldview in *Things Fall Apart*.

And the beauty of Achebe's novel is how swiftly it manages to convey this worldview to the reader and lend it a sense of cultural thickness. And one of the effects that this switching of our position as readers in Achebe's novel, vis-à-vis Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is that the colonial encounter reveals itself in a whole new light to us. Take for instance the scene in Chapter 16 in *Things Fall Apart* which describes the arrival of a European Christian missionary in the village of Umuofia.

Now, by the time the scene is introduced in the novel, the readers have already gone over pages and pages of thick descriptions by Achebe describing minute details of various rituals and customs which form part of the religious life of the African clan. Now, this means that by the time we reached the scene describing the arrival of the European missionary, the African religious world has become so familiar to us readers that we have started accepting it as the norm.

Which means that we are readily able to sympathise with the Africans of the Umuofia village when they can neither make head nor tail of the new religion of Christianity that the white man brings along with him. And we share the confoundedness of the villages of Umuofia when they are confronted with something which to them is as bizarre as the concept of Trinity for instance.

Now, and if you place *Things Fall Apart* against *Heart of Darkness* we realise that ironically, with this switch in our perspective, the incomprehensible mad African world of Conrad's novel ceases to be abnormal. And it is the Europeans world that starts looking bizarre and even mad. However before we proceed any further with the novel let us go through the plot of the novel.

And but here I should say that I will not summarise the story of the novel for which you need to go to the novel and you need to read it. And I am sure that it will be a very rewarding experience. But what I am going to put forward today is a few salient plot points which we will use to map this novel and to discuss this novel. Now these plot points are arranged chronologically in the sense that they are arranged in the way that they occur in the novel, in the narrative. And the narrative of the novel in terms of time is pretty straightforward. There aren't many flashbacks or things like that. So it is pretty straightforward. It flows unidirectionally almost throughout the novel. But I have also tried, while listing these plot points chronologically, I have also tried to introduce a thematic pattern into these points. And I have divided the points into three main thematic groups.

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Introducing Okonkwo

- **Okonkwo**, the son of **Unoka**, is a celebrated member of the Umuofia clan who is known for his wrestling abilities
- **Okonkwo** has a large family with a number of wives and children which also includes the teenage boy **Ikemefuna** who was gifted by a neighbouring tribe to settle a dispute

So if you look at this first one, as the title of this slide tells you this is about introducing the character Okonkwo. Okonkwo is the protagonist of Achebe's novel and he is a celebrated member of the Umuofia clan. And the whole plot is actually an unfolding of the life and of the career of this central character. So I have, as you can see, I have listed a few points, under this thematic heading of Introducing Okonkwo. And we will come to each of these points later. So you do not have to worry about them just now.

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Okonkwo's Transgressions

- **Okonkwo** beats up his youngest wife during the sacred week of peace.
- **Okonkwo** kills **Ikemefuna**
- **Okonkwo** accidentally kills the son of his clansman **Ogbuefi Ezeudu** during Ezeudu's funeral and is exiled from his village

The next thematic division aims to discuss the various transgressions that Okonkwo commits and this in fact forms the very meat of the novel. And now here I have listed three points under the heading Okonkwo's Transgressions. And as you can see, each of these three points list a murder or an attempted murder committed by the protagonist Okonkwo.

So again, as with the previous slide, we will come back to each of these points later. And by the way, if you have not noticed, please note that the words written in bold letters in all of these slides that I will be presenting today are names of characters in the novel. So please take note of that and take special care in remembering these characters.

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Okonkwo and the Conflict with the Europeans

- **Okonkwo's son Nwoye** joins the Christian missionaries
- Conflict with the Christian missionaries leads to the arrest and humiliation of the Umuofia leaders
- **Okonkwo** kills a court messenger
- **Okonkwo** commits suicide

Now moving on to the third slide, here I talk about the effects of the European colonial incursion with the African society and Okonkwo's engagement with these effects. And it is from this last slide that I want to start my discussion today. And I will then be gradually backtracking to the earliest slides. So in this slide, as you can see the first point that I have listed here is that Nwoye, who is one of Okonkwo's sons, he joins the Christian missionaries.

Now the implication of this action will become clearer as we go along. But for now we just need to note that near about the mid-way in the novel we are told that a Christian missionary has arrived in Umuofia village. Now here I would like to clarify a point that though I keep referring to the village society of Umuofia and though even while reading the novel you will come across the phrase "the village of Umuofia", Umuofia is actually the name of a clan in the novel.

A clan which belongs to the Igbo tribe and this clan inhabits not one but nine different villages. But these nine different villages are nevertheless geographically and culturally very closely interlinked and well knit together. So when I am referring to Umuofia, I am actually

referring to this entire village community. And here you should also note that there are different names given to these nine villages.

And the two important names are that of Iguedo, which is Okonkwo's own home village. And later on, if you read the novel you will see that Okonkwo gets exiled from his home village. And he then moves to the home village of his mother which is Mbanta. So now, but coming back to the missionary who comes to Umuofia to set up his Christian church, his name is Mr. Brown and though Mr. Brown's agenda is to convert Africans to Christianity he avoids antagonising the inhabitants of Umuofia.

And he avoids going into any direct confrontation with them. But soon enough, Mr Brown dies and he is replaced by another figure named Reverend James Smith who, unlike Mr Brown, has a stricter outlook. And he does not believe for instance in putting up with the rituals and observances of the people of Umuofia which he considers un-Christian, and therefore barbaric, any which way.

And in this new vitiated atmosphere of conflict and confrontation that Reverend Smith creates, a new Christian convert, an African but converted to Christianity who goes by the name of Enoch he does something drastic. He goes to an annual fest that is going on in Umuofia village and there he performs an act of sacrilege. He humiliates a representation of an ancestral spirit which is a great humiliation indeed.

And in an act of revenge the people of Umuofia then burns down the house of Enoch as well as the church of Reverend Smith. And by doing so they bring out the conflict between the newly arrived Christians and the villages of Umuofia out into the open.

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Now the European district commissioner takes a very strong view of this arson case and as the second point in this slide suggests, he arrests the leaders of Umuofia and humiliates them by putting them in jail. After the release of the leaders, Okonkwo takes a decisive action, against this incursion of colonial authority into the traditional village life, and he kills the leader of the court messengers who had come to the people of Umuofia as representatives of the European district administration. But what Okonkwo fails to do is he fails to enthuse his

fellow villagers to wage war against the white man's authority, and finally failing to do so he commits suicide.

Now this story as I have just narrated it to you might appear to be a tale of a great African warrior engaged in a solitary fight against colonial oppression to protect the dignity of his own people. But this would be a simplistic reading of the narrative. Because if we trace back the life and career of Okonkwo and his previous engagement with his own community and his own family we will see that Achebe paints a much more complex picture of the colonial situation and the subjugation and downfall of the Umuofian village community.

Now to understand this complex picture I think we should start at the very beginning and try and understand the character of the protagonist Okonkwo better.

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Now Okonkwo is introduced early in the novel as the son of a person called Unoka. Unoka in turn is introduced as a talented musician but as a person who is a coward, who is regarded as a coward and who is also a spendthrift. And he has debts all over Umuofia. Now Okonkwo from his very childhood feels ashamed about his father and his entire character is in turn shaped by a desire to separate himself from the kind of identity that his father has in Umuofia and to fashion himself as an absolute contrast to his father, as someone who is physically strong and courageous, as against the cowardliness of his father. And this physical strength, physical prowess and manliness, courage, et cetera, these are precisely the virtues that are also shown as very highly respected by the Umuofian society in general. So, Okonkwo proves his prowess by defeating in a famous match, he defeats a well known wrestler called the Cat.

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And from then on he rises to become one of the tallest leaders of the Umuofia clan who supports a large family with his wealth and has a number of wives and a number of children. Now what is ironic however is that this very physical prowess which earns Okonkwo so much respect within the village society also frequently brings him in conflict with the rules and customs of the village community.

Having said this, I would also like to point out here that Okonkwo never deliberately flouts any of the traditional regulations but rather his very attempt to exercise his physical strength,

a leader of the village community forces him to transgress the limits established by the Umuofian law. So how does this happen ?

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Let us look through these instances of Okonkwo's Transgressions. The first serious transgression that Okonkwo commits is that he mercilessly beats up his youngest wife during the period of peace in which the people of Umuofia, are ritually prohibited from committing any violence. Now the reason for which Okonkwo beats his wife is because he thinks that his wife is neglecting her wifely duties and indeed, within the Umuofian society where masculine dominance and physical aggression are highly priced, Okonkwo is almost expected to chastise and even perhaps beat his wife for such negligence. But this expectation, that as the man of the house Okonkwo will keep a very tight leash on the women folk of the house, comes in conflict with the ritual prohibition against committing violence in the sacred week of peace.

And it is this internal conflict that is there within the society which traps Okonkwo and makes him commit a transgression even while actually abiding by the unwritten laws or expectations of the society. Now this kind of contradiction again undoes Okonkwo when he kills his adopted son, Ikemefuna and he does that to prove his courage.

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Now Ikemefuna was gifted by another tribe to Umuofia to avoid an inter-tribe conflict and Okonkwo had raised Ikemefuna as his own son. However, when a village oracle commands that Ikemefuna should be put to death, not only does Okonkwo not protest against this but indeed he does the deed himself. He himself kills Ikemefuna and by doing so he again commits another transgression. Because the oracle had also asked Okonkwo to keep away from the whole business because he was like a father to Ikemefuna. But the reason that Okonkwo murders Ikemefuna is that, as I have already told you, he constantly is haunted by the fear that others might think that he is weak. Others might think that he is just like his father who is a coward. And therefore Okonkwo is always under this tremendous pressure to prove his masculine prowess by acting it out. By acting it out by beating his wife, by killing his adopted son, or as in the third case where his transgression results in an accidental killing of a sixteen-year old son of a clansman.

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And he accidentally kills him by when sort of his loaded gun fires at the boy and shoots him down. And this loaded gun which accidentally fires and kills the boy acts as a perfect metaphor of Okonkwo who also, just like the loaded gun, acts as a loose cannon throughout the novel who is powerful yet it is this very power which makes Okonkwo a destructive force just like the gun.

Thus when near the end of the novel Okonkwo emerges as the person who single-handedly attempts to wage war against the coloniser, the scene is filled with irony. And this is because the reader perceives Okonkwo both as a heroic figure who shows the courage to stand up to the white man's coercion as well as an antagonist whose very presence is disruptive to the society to which he belongs. So Okonkwo simultaneously emerges near the end of the novel as a heroic figure and as a villainous character.

So as I have just said it is the same figure of Okonkwo who both tears apart his community and who shows the potential to save it from the white man's oppression. Thus, as the reader realises, the colonial subjugation of Africa as Achebe depicts it in this novel, is not the simplistic story of a strong European aggressor conquering and subjugating the weak Africans.

The external force of the European colonisers represented here through the figure of the District Commissioner definitely plays a role in the downfall of Umuofia and the subjugation of the villagers. But it is not the sole agent which brings about this course of action. As William Butler Yeats suggests in his poem "The Second Coming" from which Achebe borrows the title of this novel, things fall apart precisely because the centre cannot hold them together. And the clan of Umuofia falls because Okonkwo, the man who is at the centre of the community, fails to hold the people together. And this failure is most evident in the way he beats, kills and alienates members of his own family. And here I am not only talking about his youngest wife or Ikemefuna who he kills, but also his son Nwoye whom he constantly ill-treats because he is effeminate.

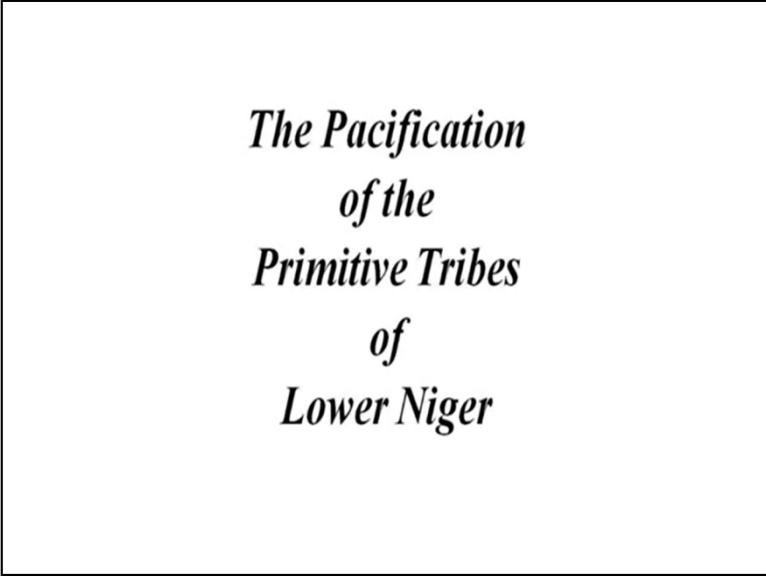
Again Okonkwo applies that exaggerated standard of masculinity on to his son and finds him lacking, finds him almost an echo of Unoka. So he constantly ill-treats Nwoye. And this results in Nwoye ultimately leaving his father and joining forces with the Christian missionaries to escape from the abuses of Okonkwo. Now this brings us to a realisation that

Okonkwo, even before the other villagers refused to stand by him to fight the white man, has already become a defeated man - a man from whom even his son tries to escape and become a Christian missionary.

But and therefore it does not really come as a surprise, when near the end of the novel Okonkwo commits suicide by hanging himself. However, in the last chapter of *Things Fall Apart* the focus moves from Okonkwo to the District Commissioner who arrives at Okonkwo's village with armed men to avenge the killing of his court messenger whom Okonkwo, if you remember, had killed.

Of course, before the Commissioner arrives Okonkwo has already committed suicide. And the Commissioner does not manage to get hold of Okonkwo but he nevertheless plans to devote a chapter to Okonkwo and to the incidents surrounding his suicide in a book that he has already started writing. And *Things Fall Apart* ends with the title of this book that the Commissioner is writing.

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*The Pacification
of the
Primitive Tribes
of
Lower Niger*

And the title of the book is *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Lower Niger*. And here in this very last moment, Achebe masterfully brings together two aspects of European colonisation that we have been discussing throughout this course. The first aspect is of course that of military force and military coercion which is represented by the armed guards who come with the District Commissioner. But there is of course another aspect to colonialism which is the aspect of colonial discourse and that aspect is represented by this unfinished book of the commissioner. And like any colonial discourse this use of the colonial discourse also tries to translate the colonial oppression and coercion, to look like a civilising mission.

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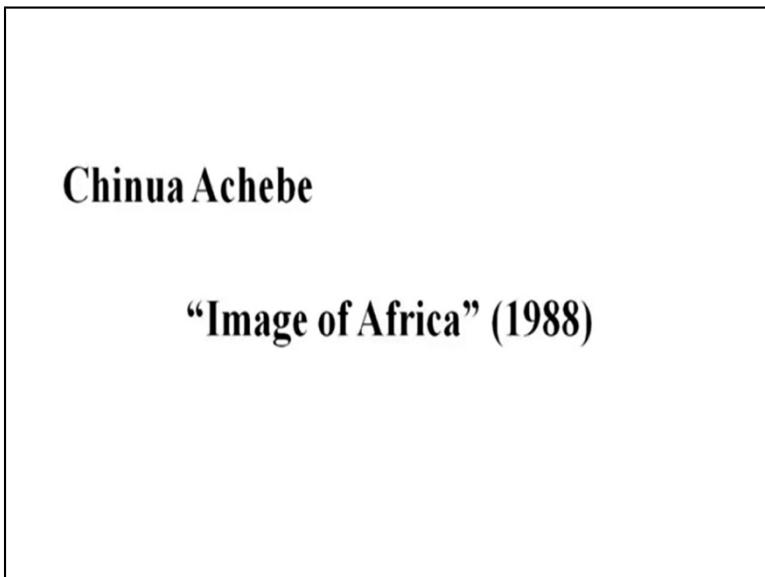
And this is evident even from the title of the book where the colonial oppression in Africa is rendered as “Pacification”. And the title also diminishes the highly complex social structure of the Igbo community which the novel has introduced us to into the activities of a “Primitive Race” - a race which is savage, barbaric and not even fully human. And as I have mentioned in my earlier lecture, it is precisely to counter this image of Africa and Africans that Achebe took to write *Things Fall Apart*.

So, with this we come to an end of our discussion of Chinua Achebe and his first novel. And in the next lecture we will start looking at colonialism and postcolonialism from within the Indian perspective. Thank you.

Lecture No. #09
Decolonisation and the Discourse of Nationalism : The Context of India

Welcome to another lecture on postcolonial literature. As I said in our previous meeting, that today we will start discussing postcolonialism from the Indian perspective. But before we start doing that, let us take up Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for one last time because I think that novel will help us connect with our discussion today better. Now usually when students read *Things Fall Apart*, especially after reading Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, like we have done and after reading Achebe's criticism of *Heart of Darkness*, in his essay "The Image of Africa", they are left with a slight confusion.

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And the confusion tends primarily from the fact that, what they expect Achebe to do in the novel, especially after their reading of "Image of Africa" is, they expect Achebe to criticise European colonial oppression in Africa from an African's standpoint.

But as we have discussed in our previous lecture, when we read Achebe's novel, what you find is that in *Things Fall Apart* there is no simple condemnation of the European colonial authority. Colonial authority represented by the figure of the District Commissioner, if you

remember, who was also the author of the book *Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Lower Niger*.

Now, instead, or rather on the contrary, what we see Achebe doing in his novel is, he is focusing primarily even on the fault lines that were already present within the precolonial Umuofian society. And as we have seen things fall apart in the novel, primarily because the central figure, who is Okonkwo, he cannot hold the community together. And he, as a centre of that community, fails, falters, and ultimately sort of, commits suicide.

Now, therefore in Achebe's novel, we see that the main preoccupation is not so much with the external pressures of colonialism, that does play a role in dismantling the society, but the primary focus is not that. The primary focus is on the precolonial society, African society, itself. And how certain very problematic fault lines exist already within the society which leads to its ultimate downfall under the pressure of colonialism.

But the question here is why does Achebe spend so much more time finding fault with the precolonial African society and its traditional practices than with portraying the violent intrusions of European colonisers who subjugated Africa? Now, to get an answer to this question we have to remember that though countering the colonial perspective as it appears in European novels like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* might have been one of the reasons behind Achebe writing his novel, *Things Fall Apart* is however not just meant as an answer to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and its portrayal of Africa. In other words, Achebe was not merely writing back to the West. Rather, he was also engaging with his fellow Africans and with his contemporary milieu with the novel. So we should remember that, though *Things Fall Apart* at one level is an attempt to counter the colonial discourse on Africa as it appears in novels like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, it is not solely about that.

It is also about engaging with the fellow Africans and with the contemporary African milieu. So Achebe was not merely writing back to Conrad, he was also writing to engage with his fellow Africans. And what was that contemporary milieu within which this book was produced? Well, we should remember that *Things Fall Apart* was written during the 1950's. And anyone who is familiar with African history will know that this was the decade when agitations to gain independence from the European colonial rule was sweeping across the entire African subcontinent. Indeed, the year 1958, the year when *Things Fall Apart* was

published, was also the year when the motion for the Nigerian independence was passed and it was agreed that Nigeria will become an independent nation state from the 1st of October 1960.

So, as you can see *Things Fall Apart* was written not at a time when colonial forces were making fresh inroads in Africa. Rather, it was written at a time when the process of decolonisation was in progress. And in this milieu of decolonisation, when the Colonial structure was being discarded and Africans were searching for alternative ways of politically, socially, and culturally organising their lives, *Things Fall Apart* tried to take stock of the precolonial African society.

Now, in various parts of the once colonised world, to do away with the colonial structure often meant, or rather I should say, was often accompanied by a desire to revert back to a precolonial past which is again often assumed to be some sort of a golden age. Now, *Things Fall Apart* cautions against any such simplistic desire to revert back to the past by revealing the many fault lines and internal contradictions that plagued the African society even before it came under the corrupting influence of the European colonialism.

So, as I said earlier, things fall apart in the novel precisely because, the traditional centre of the African society, could not hold them together and what the novel seems to suggest therefore is that there is no easy way of going back to the precolonial past without thinking through the crisis that undermined it. And Achebe seems to be pointing out that the crisis was not merely external, there are many things wrong internally also within the precolonial society.

Now the reason I started today's discussion with *Things Fall Apart* is because it introduces us to a new set of concerns within the field of postcolonialism. So far in our discussion of the various literary texts we have concerned ourselves with the process of colonialism and with colonial discourse analysis. But as *Things Fall Apart* exemplifies, much of the literature that is today read under the banner of postcolonialism concerns itself with the process of decolonisation.

And in today's lecture this is going to be our main concern. We are going to look at the process of decolonisation through the Indian perspective. Now when I say the "Indian"

perspective, it is important to ask the question whose perspective or what is that perspective which I am identifying here as the Indian perspective? Now, one could have asked the same question while we were discussing the African perspective in our previous lecture but because the Indian context is more intimately familiar to us, I think this is the ideal time for us to pause and take a look at the very important question and try and understand the ramifications of this question. Now I think all of you will agree that qualifiers or adjectives like African or Indian are too vague to mean anything precise and that is primarily the case because of the immense social, cultural, economic diversities and variations that these qualifiers incorporate within themselves.

So, let us try to look at the adjective “Indian” more closely. And, this is important because for the next few lectures we will be using this qualifier very often. So, what does Indian mean? At least, what does Indian mean within the context of this series of lecture on Postcolonial literature? When I use the word Indian perspective on decolonisation, what I primarily mean is the perspective of the Indian middle class. Right. But again middle class is also a term which can mean different things to different people.

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The Indian Middle Class

- In his book *Modern India 1885-1947*, Sumit Sarkar defines middle class as the new English-educated group of people who started emerging as a distinct section of the Indian society during the nineteenth century.
- This new middle-class, though it styled itself after the Western bourgeoisie, was almost entirely dissociated from the entrepreneurial business activities that typically formed the material basis of the bourgeoisie in the West.
- Rather they were primarily engaged in government employment or in professions like law, education, journalism and medicine for which their English education made them particularly well suited.

So let me clarify here that I base my understanding of the term middle class on Sumit Sarkar’s historical study titled *Modern India 1885-1947*. And in this book Sarkar defines a middle class. And I have sort of tried to divide that definition into these points. But this is how Sumit Sarkar defines middle class in his book. So, he says that middle class was the new English educated group of people who started emerging as a distinct section of the Indian society during the 19th century.

And then, commenting on the social roots of this new middle class, Sarkar observes that though this class styled itself after the bourgeoisie, who formed the middle class in the West, they were almost entirely dissociated from the entrepreneurial business activities that typically form the material basis of the bourgeoisie in the West. So, if they were not engaged in business, how can one classify themselves in terms of the occupation? Well, they were engaged in government employments.

Or, you could see the middle class engaged in professions like law, education, journalism, medicine, etcetera. And their English education made them eminently suitable to take up these government jobs as well as for these professions. Now, here to complete the socio-economic picture, I must also add that this newly emergent middle class also had some form of connections with land and a part of their income came from the land rent that they collected as petty landowners or small landlords.

And, well, during the 19th and early 20th century, it was perhaps only in Bombay that one could see some connection between the Indian middle class and business but we will need to remember that by and large big business in India under the colonial governance was directly controlled by the ruling Europeans. So, a large section of the Indians were not involved in big business under the colonial rule.

Now before I go into the reasons for choosing this particular section of the population to discuss the Indian perspective on decolonisation, I need to remind you that they were not the first group of people who came up with the idea of decolonisation in India. Indeed, much before the Indian middle class came into the picture there were other social groups like the tribals for instance or the peasants who were regularly agitating against the colonial rule in India.

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And indeed, there is this other book by Sumit Sarkar, the very readable book titled "*Popular Movements and "Middle-Class" Leadership in Late Colonial India*", which beautifully explores these forms of anti-colonial agitations, which preceded the rise of the middle class and which continued even while the middle class started gaining prominence. But having said this I would still like to focus on the middle-class to study the Indian perspective on decolonisation primarily for these two reasons:

***“Popular” Movements
and
“Middle-Class” Leadership
in
Late Colonial India***

Sumit Sarkar

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1. Middle-class anti-colonial discourse as a national discourse
2. Indian literature read under the category of postcolonialism is largely the literature produced by the middle class

The first reason is that it was the middle class who from around the late 19th century could forge an anti-colonial discourse which got accepted as the national discourse. In other words, the middle-class, while arguing against the colonial rule, could put themselves forward as representatives of the entire nation and they could convince the various other sections of the Indian population that the middle-class leadership represented the interests of all the factions of the Indian population.

And to understand this, you can actually perform a very simple experiment. So, just try and think of any major figure who emerged as a leader during the middle-class led anti-colonial struggle that started in India from the early 20th century. Any leader who played a prominent

role in the anti-colonial struggle from the early 20th century onwards. Now, chances are that the figures that you have thought belongs to the middle-class.

So, for instance, if you have thought of Bal Gangadhar Tilak or Bipin Chandra Pal, or C.R. Das or M.K. Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru or Subhash Chandra Bose, you would notice that they were all English educated and were involved in one kind of profession or other. Indeed, if you carefully go through this list of names that I have just read out, you will see that most of them were actually trained as barristers.

But, when you think about their engagement with the anti-colonial, in sort of Independence movement, you think of them as national leaders, as leaders who claimed to speak on behalf of the entire nation, the entire Indian population, rather than on behalf of, say, just the barristers or just the English educated middle-class. You do not think of them like that. Right. Now whether they were truly representative of the interests of all the sections of Indian population or not is a matter of debate, and indeed the literature available on this debate is voluminous.

But what is important to note here is that these representatives of the middle-class were able to forge a counter discourse to colonialism, which claimed to be the discourse of the nation. So, when we discuss the Indian perspective on decolonisation, we therefore will be actually discussing the perspective as presented through the nationalist discourse of anti-colonialism generated by the middle-class. Because it is only in this middle-class discourse that we first come across the notion of a nation speaking out against the colonial rule.

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The second reason for focusing on the middle-class is because the kind of Indian literature that gets studied under the category of Postcolonial literature remains predominantly the production of the middle class. And we will discuss this middle class bias as well as the attempts made within postcolonial studies to go beyond the narrow confines of the middle class and their concerns when we discuss subalternity later.

But for now, let us return to the discourse of nationalism which the middle-class created to counter the colonial discourse. Right. Now, the origin of the middle-class nationalist discourse can be traced back to the 19th century and the most important questions around

which this discourse crystallised were: 1. Why was India colonised? and 2. How can it become free again?

So, very simple, very basic questions but fundamental questions nevertheless around which the middle class generated this discourse of anti-colonial nationalism. Now by the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, thanks to the works of such European orientalists like William Jones for instance, H.T. Colebrooke, Nathaniel Halhed (these are names which I have already mentioned in my previous lecture, in one of my early lectures, if you remember), now thanks to them it was already established that the Indian language of Sanskrit shared a very strong affinity to the European classical languages like Greek and Latin. And for the Europeans this led to the assumption that some kind of civilizational affinity existed between classical Europe and classical India. Now in the colonial discourse, therefore, India unlike Africa was not outright dismissed as land of barbarians and savages.

It was not a dismissed because of this notion of affinity. If anything was related to the exalted classical age of the Greeks, for instance, then how can one dismiss it as a land of barbarians? Rather, the way the colonial argument was shaped was like this that India was once a civilised land but its people had now fallen from that grace and that is why they need the mature and enlightened guidance of the colonial authority to conduct their affairs.

And here, I think you can realise that we are back again to the idea of colonialism as a civilising mission. So, unlike Africa, India was regarded as a once civilised country, a once civilised land but clearly the level of civilisation from the European perspective had gone down. And that was the excuse which the Europeans used to say that, see, we are here to civilise or to re-civilise, in want of a better word, the Indians.

Now, in its early phase, the middle-class nationalist discourse readily adopted this idea of a golden past as well as the narrative of the fall from grace because that helped explain why India had become colonised in the first place. So, the middle class nationalists therefore argued that clearly India had started lacking some quality which they had possessed during the fabled golden age of the past, which was why the outsiders could come and colonise the land.

So far the early form of a middle class nationalist discourse and the colonial discourse was more or less in agreement. There was no major divergence. Where they started, where the colonial discourse and the middle-class nationalist discourse started diverging was the point where the early nationalists argued that it was possible to return back to that fabled golden past by rectifying the shortcomings that had led to the fall.

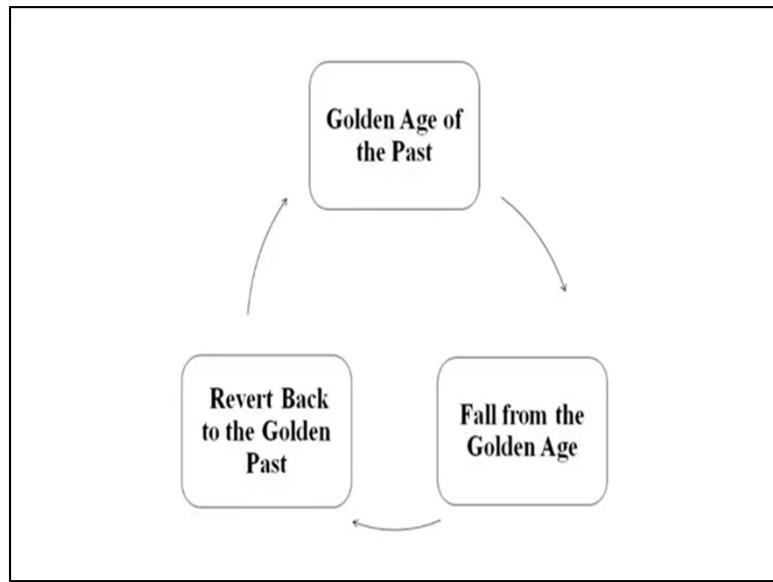
So as you can see here, in any movement towards decolonisation there exists a natural tendency to glorify the precolonial past and a desire to return to that fabled past. So when Chinua Achebe was writing about precolonial Africa in his *Things Fall Apart*, he was trying to make an argument precisely against this simplistic attempt to return to a fabled past as a solution for the present problems.

But as we shall see in our next few lectures, the conviction that a movement away from colonialism should mean a return to a golden past strongly underlined the middle-class nationalist discourse right from the 19th century down to the Gandhian era of the 20th century. However, we need to note two things here. Firstly, though the notion of a golden past remained mostly constant, different middle-class intellectuals conceived it differently.

Thus, if we trace the development of the Indian nationalist discourse from the 19th to the 20th century we will find in it differing opinions about what constitutes the golden age for instance, about the time when it ended, about the reasons which led to its demise and things like that. So, about the golden age there exists significant diversity within the national discourse.

The second thing that we should note is that if we study the nationalist discourse we can find in it diverging opinions about how Indians should recover themselves from the degenerate state that they are apparently in the present and how they should regain the golden age. Now, we will explore these differences more closely when we deal with individual literary texts but for now we should keep in mind the basic cyclical pattern:

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And, here you can see the pattern starts with the golden past and then it proceeds to the fall and then it loops back to the past through a future possibility of recovering the golden age. And this pattern remained more or less constant throughout the development of the nationalist discourse. So in our next lecture we will analyse this cyclical pattern more closely with reference to specific literary texts. Thank you.

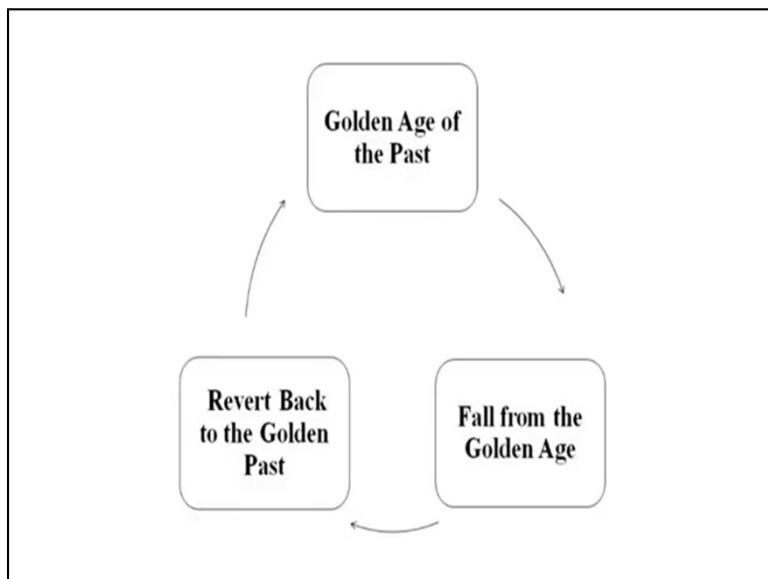
Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #10
Sonnets of Henry Derozio

Welcome back to this series of lecture on postcolonial literature. Today we will be continuing with our discussion on decolonisation from the Indian perspective and we will be doing so with special reference to the poetry of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. But before we start exploring the poems of Derozio, let us dwell a little longer on the English educated middle class which emerged in India during the 19th century and the nationalist discourse that they forged.

Now as I have already said in my previous lecture, that one of the characteristic features of this national discourse that the middle class came up with was an underlying cyclical pattern. And this pattern looks something like this:

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This is already a known slide. I am using it from the previous lecture. And we can see that according to this pattern, India was once a land of high civilisation which represented its golden age. But the people of this subcontinent had subsequently fallen from that superior position and the golden age was now lost. So the present India therefore represented a kind of

a degenerate state of being which was confirmed by the fact that Indians had now become a colonised race who were subjugated by the Europeans.

Now the present India as I said is an India of decay and degeneration. But this pattern which talks about a fall from the golden age, also talks about a regeneration. So the fall from the golden age of the past, according to this pattern, is to be remedied in the future which will be marked by a reversion back to the golden age.

Now as I have said earlier, if you study the development of the middle class nationalist discourse we will observe various differences regarding, say for instance, what constitutes this Indian golden age, when did it come to an end, what are the reasons for its coming to an end and things like that.

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But the underlying cyclical pattern which you can see in this slide remain the same till say the Gandhian era of the 20th century.

And as we shall see today, this cyclical pattern already started emerging quite early during the 19th century. So this pattern can clearly be traced in the discourse of the middle class from as far back as the early 19th century down to the Gandhian era of the 20th century. And the text where this cyclical pattern of the Indian nationalist discourse is most explicitly evident is perhaps in the Bengali novel *Anandamath* written by the 19th century Bengali novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

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**Bankimchandra
Chattpadhyay**
(1838-1894)



Bankimchandra's dates are 1838 to 1894 and his career is typically that of an individual belonging to the new Indian middle class that started emerging from the 19th century. Indeed, Bankim, typical of the middle class, he was also an English educated person and was in fact one of the first students to graduate from the Calcutta University which was set up in 1857 along with the universities of Bombay and Madras to promote western style education in India.

Bankimchandra served the British government first as a Deputy Collector and then as a Deputy Magistrate and near the end of his life he was awarded by the colonial government with the title of CIE or the Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire. So in one sense Bankimchandra was quite thoroughly integrated as part of the colonial authority, he was part of the colonial system itself.

But this is only one side of his career which is in fact almost forgotten today. Today Bankimchandra is remembered, almost exclusively, as one of the first, and here I quote the words of the historian Partha Chatterjee, he is remembered as "one of the first systematic expounders in India of the principles of nationalism". And indeed, his novel *Anandamath* can easily be regarded as one of the founding texts of Indian middle class nationalist discourse.

And as most of us will know, the song Vande Mataram, which is contained in this novel *Anandamath*, was inextricably associated with the middle class led nationalist movement throughout the 20th century. And of course, later in independent India, it became the national

song. So as I was saying, it is in this novel *Anandamath*, that we most clearly encounter the cyclical pattern of a glorious past, a fall from it, and a future promise of reverting back to it.

In this novel which tells the story of the sanyasi rebellion that erupted in Bengal during the late 18th century, the hero Mahendra is, at one point in the novel, shown three different images of the Mother Goddess by the sanyasis to explain to him the reason for which the rebellion was organised by them. And the three different images of Mother Goddess that Mahendra sees are variously described as, the first one is described as the Mother as she was. The second one is described as the Mother as she is at present. And the third one is a depiction of the Mother as she will become or as she will be in the future. And each of these images they represent in the novel different states of the country India in past, present, and future. And the first, which depicts the Mother Goddess as the resplendent Jagatdhatri, “perfectly formed and decorated with every ornament”, represents the glorious past of India. The second depicting her as Kali, who “has been robbed of everything”, represents the state of misery which the country has fallen into in the present. And the third depicting her as Durga, “glistening and smiling in the early morning rays”, and these are words from the novel, holds out the promise of a future regeneration of the ancient glories. And it is for this future regeneration that the sanyasis are apparently working.

Now according to Bankimchandra the transformation of the Motherland from the first image, that of the resplendent Jagatdhatri, to the second image, that of Kali, who has been robbed of everything, was manifested by the lack of independence. And it was the third image therefore was an attempt to regain back that resplendent earliest stature which the Mother enjoyed.

But an attempt to regain back the state of glory in the future, Bankimchandra’s novel seems to suggest, would require superhuman efforts by what is referred to as the “santans” or the children of the motherland. But interestingly, if we read the novel through, we will realise that this effort to relieve the Mother of its present miseries and to revert her back to the past glories is not an effort that is to be automatically directed against the British colonial rule.

Now this might sound somewhat counter-intuitive to us today, but as a long monologue near the end of the novel argues, without the help of the colonial rule the Hindus will not be able to regain their earlier glory which was characterised by a way of life which is referred to in

the novel as “Sanatan Dharma”. Now here it is important to note that in Bankimchandra’s writings we find a problematic merging of terms like Indian, Hindu, and Bengali.

And here also in the novel there is this very problematic overlapping of these terms and when we read Bankimchandra we need to keep this in mind. Because the novelist seems to use these terms almost as synonymous, though they are evidently not. But coming back to the monologue, we find the monologue stating this:

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Unless the English rule, it will not be possible for the Eternal Code [*sanatan dharma*] to be reinstated. [...] The true Hindu rule of life is based on knowledge, not on action. And this knowledge is of two kinds — outward and inward. The inward knowledge is the chief part of the Eternal Code, but unless the outward knowledge arises first, the inward cannot arise. [...] For a long time now the outward knowledge has been lost in this land, and so the true Eternal Code has been lost too. [...] The English are very good in the outward knowledge, and they are very good at instructing people. Therefore, we will make the English king.

Anandamath (my translation)

Unless the English rule, it will not be possible for the Eternal Code or the sanatan dharma to be reinstated. The true Hindu rule of life is based on knowledge, not on action. And, this knowledge is of two kinds - outward and inward. The inward knowledge is the chief part of the Eternal Code (*sanatan dharma*), but unless the outward knowledge arises first, the inward cannot arise. For a long time now the outward knowledge has been lost in this land, and so the true Eternal Code has been lost too. The English are very good in the outward knowledge, and they are very good at instructing people. Therefore, we will make the English king.

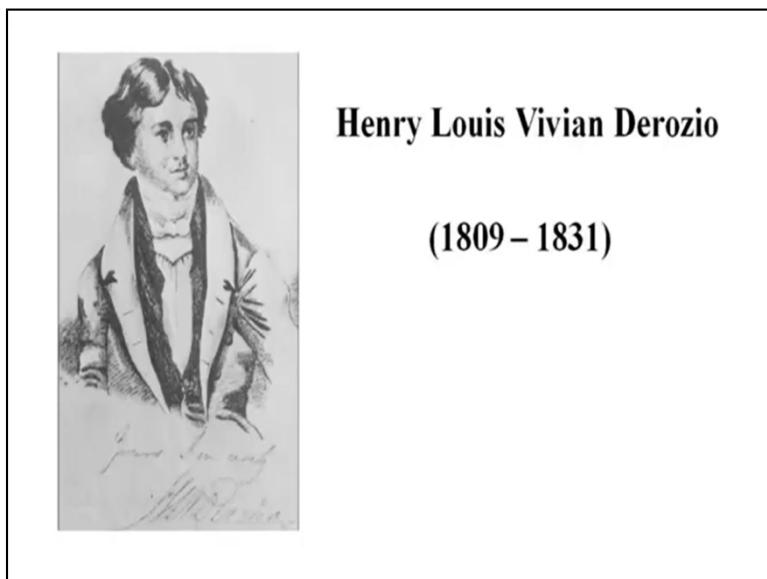
So the argument in this section of the monologue is that though the subjugation of the Indians/Hindus by a foreign power is symptomatic of their fall from the golden age, colonial rule is nevertheless necessary to regain that position of power. This is because the Western knowledge, that the European colonisers bring with them, is essential for the reestablishment of the sanatan dharma which, according to Bankim at least, is the true Hindu/Indian way of life. So the colonial rule therefore becomes the very means of overcoming the state of

subjugation and the western knowledge system becomes the very template on which Bankim scripts the discourse of decolonisation.

Therefore, in this early phase of nationalist discourse as encountered in the works of Bankimchandra for instance we are finding a unique mixture of respect towards the Western civilisation and Western knowledge system of the coloniser and an attempt to move towards a decolonised future when India will be restored to its past glory. We should remember this unique composition of the nationalist discourse, because later, when we will study the Gandhian discourse of the 20th century when we are doing Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, we will see it that this early respect for the coloniser civilisation becomes one of the main targets of Gandhi's attack. Right.

But today we will not proceed to Gandhi and the 20th century modification of this nationalist discourse. Rather we are going to move back. We are going to go back to the early 19th century and see how the thought patterns that we have identified in Bankimchandra's nationalist discourse is found in a nascent state in the poetry of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.

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Now Derozio, whose image you can see here, was born in 1809 in Calcutta and he died at a rather young age in 1831. But in spite of this very short lifespan, Derozio had a profound impact on the contemporary Indian society. Indeed, as a popular teacher in the Hindu College of Calcutta, which was incidentally the first major institute of Western higher learning to be set up anywhere in India, Derozio is credited for introducing a whole generation of Indians to

the merits of English education or Western style education. In that regard, Derozio can be regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Indian middle class which started emerging in India during the 19th century. But today, Derozio is best remembered for his poetry which represents one of the earliest instances of the middle class attempt to forge a nationalist discourse in India.

But interestingly however, the body of poem through which Derozio articulated his nationalist thoughts, borrowed heavily from European literary traditions. And to understand this melange of European literary traditions and Indian nationalist thought in Derozio's work, let us look at this particular instance of his poetry. And this particular poem is titled "The Harp of India".

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The Harp of India

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet — who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain:
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine
Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
Those hands are cold — but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

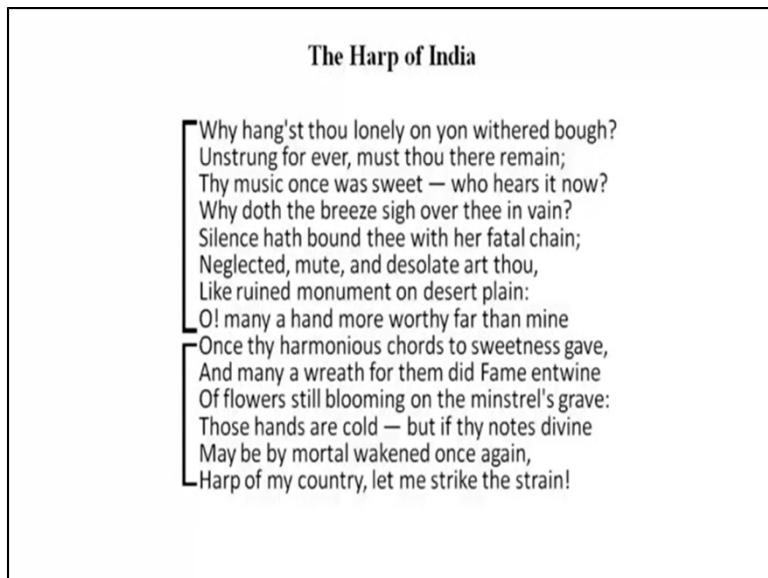
Now before we go on to the content of these fourteen lines, I would like you to note that the form of the poem is that of a sonnet. And the sonnet form is of course well known as one of the main forms of poetry in European literature. And it had its origin in Italy somewhere around the 13th century, but became very popular in England from the 16th century onwards.

And which is why one of the tallest literary figures of Britain at that point of time, William Shakespeare is also known as a great sonneteer who produced more than 150 Sonnets. This Sonnet tradition which originated in Italy and then move to England, came to India via the British literature and Derozio was one of one of the first Indian practitioners of this sonnet form. So though the sonnet tradition was thoroughly indigenised later by poets like

Michael Madhusudan Dutta for instance who produced sonnets in Bengali, when Derozio was writing during the first decades of the 19th century, sonnets were still considered primarily to be a European mode of poetic expression.

Now let us come to the inner dynamics of the sonnet form because as we will see it directly influences the nationalistic content of the poem “Harp of India”. So the fourteen lines of a sonnet, and sonnets are usually composed of fourteen lines, are usually divided into two parts.

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The first eight lines form a separate segment by itself and is referred to as the octave and the last six lines form a separate segment which is referred to as sestet. So octave and sestet. And octave and sestet are separated from one another by some differences in the rhyme scheme but I will not be focusing on the rhyme difference in today's lecture. What I am going to focus on is the difference in the thought pattern which separates the octave and the sestet.

So whatever, actually whatever thought is put forward in the first eight lines of a traditional sonnet, whatever thought is put forward in the octave, is reversed in the sestet. A very different thought, a contradictory thought is put forward in the sestet. And this change within the octave and sestet, this reversal is technically referred to as the Volta. V O L T A. Now so this octave sestet separated by a Volta was how the sonnet was divided in the conventional Italian form.

But when it came to England we see a slight change in the position of the Volta. So, for instance, in many of Shakespeare's sonnets we notice that the Volta rather than occurring at the beginning of the sestet is delayed till the very last two lines of the poem where the central thought put forward by the first twelve lines are reversed.

And when we focus on Derozio's "Harp of India" it is important to keep in mind these two possible positions of the Volta because, as I will show, Derozio applies the Volta in both these places. So, and he does that in order to thematically divide the poem into three segments rather than two. So we will discuss this when we come to the content and in fact let us come to the content right now.

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The Harp of India

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet — who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain:
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine
Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
Those hands are cold — but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

If you read the first eight lines of this poem "The Harp of India", you will see Derozio is using a broken harp as a metaphoric representation of India. So the first eight lines, it starts from "Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough", and it continues till here. So in these first eight lines we see that Derozio is talking about a broken harp which is used as a metaphorical representation of the land of India and he is lamenting about its present state of decay. The harp whose music was once so sweet has now fallen into disrepair and as the poem says, "Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain". Now please note that throughout this section of the poem Derozio uses present tense which signifies that this pitiable silence is representative of the present condition of the harp and by extension of India as a whole.

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The Harp of India

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet — who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
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Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
Those hands are cold — but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

Now if you compare this to the first four lines of the sestet, which starts with here, “Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave”, and which continues till here, “Those hands are cold”, you will see that here the poem predominantly uses the past tense and it speaks of the glory that was associated with the harp/India of the past. So the Volta that separates the octave from the sestet reverses the pitiable condition of the present by introducing us to how the harp was in the golden past.

But if you note the last two lines or rather I should say the last two and a half lines because it starts from these words “but if thy notes divine” which actually occurs in line number twelve, we will see that here Derozio introduces another Volta and he introduces another temporal schema. So here the poem is speaking about the future in which the poet will try and restore the harp, and by breaking its silence make it sing again. It is this recovery and reversion back to the golden age that is indicated by the action stated in the last line “Harp of my country, let me strike the strain” and therefore break the chains of silence which has kept it under bondage and subjugation.

So you will see there is a cyclical pattern of the golden past followed by a fall and a present state of decay giving way to a future course of action which will help revert back to the golden past is already identifiable in this poem by Derozio. And the cyclical pattern which was to become so prominent in the national discourse of Bankimchandra for instance later in the 19th century, is found repeated in a number of sonnets by Derozio. For instance, if you place Derozio’s poem “To India - My Native Land” next to his “The Harp of India” you will find the same cyclical pattern in that sonnet also. But what is also important to note,

especially with respect to “The Harp of India”, is the use of a Western template to articulate Indian nationalist thought. This we have identified in the writings of Bankimchandra, but here we see it foreshadowed in the poem of Derozio where the Western form of a sonnet is used as a vehicle to present what might be regarded as a proto-nationalist discourse.

In the next lecture we will see how this form of nationalist discourse which was initiated by Derozio and which finally flourished in the writings of Bankimchandra during in the late 19th century is transformed by M.K. Gandhi, and how this transformation wrought by Gandhi find its way in the novel of Raja Rao titled *Kanthapura*. We will do that in the next Lecture. Thank you.

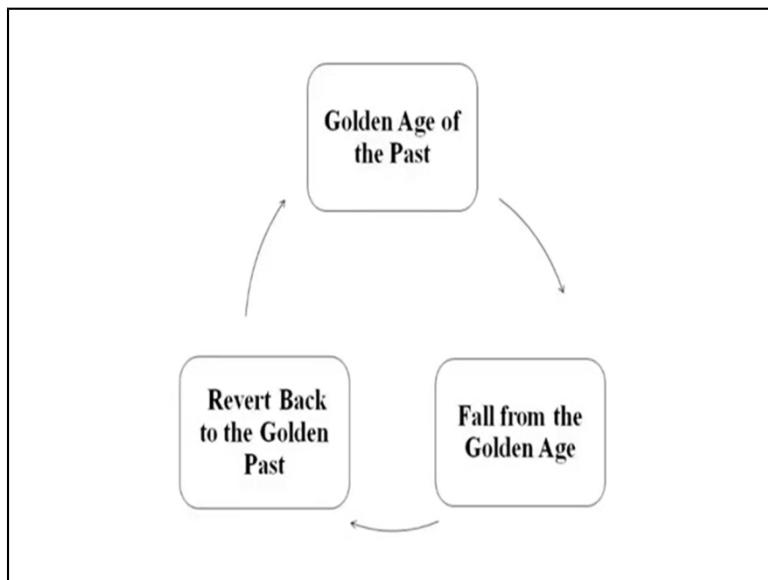
Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #11
Raja Rao's Kanthapura (I)

Welcome back to this Lecture series on postcolonial literature. As you know, we have been discussing the rise of the middle class nationalist discourse in India over the past few Lectures. And as we have seen, this middle class discourse of nationalism and of decolonisation was underpinned by certain particular patterns, thought patterns.

And we have traced the development of these thought patterns throughout the 19th century starting from the works of Henry Vivian Derozio to the works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Now in our previous lecture we have focused on two significant characteristics of this discourse.

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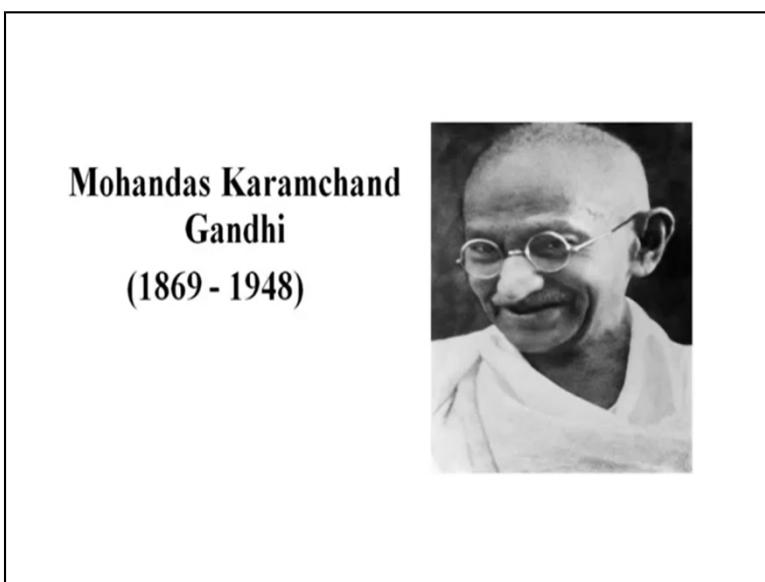


If you remember the first one was the cyclical pattern of a golden past, degenerate present, and a promise of future recovery, a future reverting back to that golden past. And this cyclical pattern was coupled with a second pattern which was a deep regard for the knowledge and cultural and civilizational values of the coloniser which were used in fact as a template to script the path towards decolonisation and the recovery of the golden past.

And this is of course familiar to you from our previous discussion. In today's lecture we are going to see how by the second decade of the 20th century this nationalist discourse and its underlying patterns and assumptions was starting to get transformed. And the main figure behind this transformation was of course M.K. Gandhi. And in this lecture today we will explore Gandhi's impact on the underlying thought patterns of the middle class nationalist discourse.

And after doing that we will then move on to Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* to see how this discourse as well as the charisma of Gandhi as a middle class anti-colonial leader was moulded in the form of fiction by Raja Rao in his novel *Kanthapura*. Right. But first let us focus on the figure of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who emerged as the supreme nationalist leader of India in the years immediately following the first world war.

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**Mohandas Karamchand
Gandhi
(1869 - 1948)**

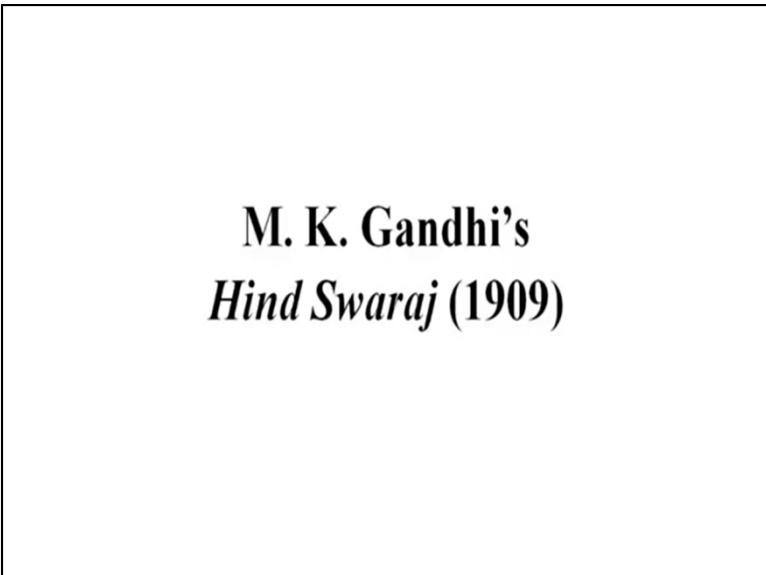
Now Gandhi's dates most of you will probably be familiar are from 1869 to 1948. And again if you study the career graph of Gandhi we will come across a trajectory that is typical of the Indian middle class as I have defined it after Sumit Sarkar in one of my previous Lectures. Now for instance Gandhi too received an English education. And indeed like many of the middle class nationalist leaders Gandhi went to England to study law.

Therefore by profession he was again, like many middle class leaders, a Barrister. And his early career as a lawyer was spent in South Africa. It was also in South Africa that Gandhi emerged as an anti-colonial political leader. And if you remember during the first half of the

20th century, during the early 20th century, when Gandhi was in South Africa both South Africa and India were British colonies.

So Gandhi arrived in India, he returned back to India, in 1915 to participate in the freedom struggle at the behest of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. And when he arrived in 1915 he was already an established political figure. Now in fact, by the time he arrived Gandhi had already published his seminal text *Hind Swaraj*, which would significantly transform the nature of the middle class nationalist discourse.

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M. K. Gandhi's
Hind Swaraj (1909)

And it is interesting to note that *Hind Swaraj* was first published in 1909. And Gandhi became the President of Indian National Congress in the 1920s when he truly became the leader of the middle class led Nationalist Movement. So there is a gap of quite a few years between the publication of *Hind Swaraj* in 1909 and his becoming the accepted supreme leader of the nationalist movement in India.

But in spite of that gap if we read *Hind Swaraj* we can identify almost all of the traces of Gandhian political ideology that he was to bring to play post the 1920s. And so in that way *Hind Swaraj* remained a very relevant text throughout Gandhi's career. And it is still relevant as a text to understand the Gandhian political ideology and Gandhi's intervention into the Nationalist Discourse.

Now contrary to the version of the national discourse that we have traced till the late 19th century writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the Gandhian discourse undermined the earlier intertwining of the respect towards the civilizational attainments of the western coloniser and the desire to decolonise India. And it broke this intertwining in two very significant ways. The first way was through questioning the fact that west represented a superior civilisation.

So for instance, this is famous incident where in which Gandhi was apparently asked, “what are your views on Western civilisation?” And he said that Western civilisation would be a good idea. Which means that according to Gandhi Western Civilisation did not even exist till the point when he was speaking. So the first major way in which Gandhi disrupted the earlier intertwining of a respect for the coloniser civilisation and Indian nationalism was by attacking the very idea of Western civilisation.

But there was also a second way in which he was critiquing the earlier nationalist discourse. And that was by making nationalism a more mass based thing. And we will talk about these two points separately in today's Lecture. So the late 19th century argument that we have already discussed. There in order to become a true Indian/Hindu if you remember, when we have discussed Bankim, we have seen a problematic overlapping between terms like Indian, Hindu, Bengali, etcetera.

So according to this late 19th century argument, in order to become a true Indian/Hindu it was imperative to learn from the European colonisers and become more like them. And this desire to fashion oneself after the European coloniser was, I would say, rather ambiguously associated with a desire to decolonise oneself. And this ambiguity is best established in the attitude towards the colonial authority that people like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay showed.

Thus for instance, in spite of Bankim being convinced that anyone with a dark skin did not stand a chance to receive fair treatment in any employment under the British colonial authority, Bankim was, as I have said earlier, equally convinced that the rule of the British was essential to teach the “Uncivilised and Uneducated people of present day India”. The present day people who had fallen from that glorious state of the past.

It was imperative for them to learn from the Europeans elements of civilisation that they had once possessed but they have now lost. So we are already familiar with this pattern that the British with their civilizational virtues were actually seen as good teachers who will teach the Indians the very same civilizational values which they had once possessed during the golden age but which they have now lost and fall in into a state of degeneration.

Now Gandhi in his turn completely rejected this argument. Because for him the loss of Indian civilizational values could be traced back precisely to the European incursion in colonial India and to the importation of “Western Civilisation” in the subcontinent during the course of colonialism. So what unlike Bankim, say for instance, what Gandhi was arguing was that Western civilisation rather than being a cure was itself the problem.

Because the fall of the Indian civilisation according to Gandhi can be traced back precisely to the moment of European colonial subjugation of India. So it is important to note here however, that for Gandhi not every European was tainted by the Western Civilisation that he was speaking against. In fact in his *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi specifies that he derives a significant part of his critique of “Western Civilisation”.

From the works of such westerners like Tolstoy for instance, or Ruskin, Turow, and Emerson, these were all really profoundly influential figures as far as Gandhi was concerned. But, Gandhi’s text also makes it evident. Thus, that these intellectuals represent a minority that stands beyond the pale of the Western civilisation which Gandhi considered to be really a Satanic civilisation.

A Satanic Civilisation, which had otherwise, to quote Gandhi, “taken such a hold on the people in Europe, that those who are in it, those who are in Europe, appear to be half mad”. And here it is interesting if you compare this with, say Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and Marlow’s perspective, Marlow seeing the Africans from his boat and considering them to be mad men. Here in *Hind Swaraj* we have Gandhi comparing the entire European population under the thrall of Western Civilisation as half mad people.

Now hence whereas for Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay it was important to learn from the colonisers. For Gandhi it was important for India to unlearn what she has learned for the many years that she had been colonised by the Europeans. According to Gandhi Western

Civilisation was essentially different from Indian civilisation. And here it is an important a very crucial point. For Bankim it was possible to learn elements of the Indian civilisation from the European colonisers.

Because if you remember our discussion of *Anandamath*, Bankim is speaking about how to revert back, how to recover the Sanatana Dharma which is typically an Indian/Hindu thing. But he is also saying that in order to recover it we should learn from the European colonisers. Which means that there are certain elements of that Sanatana Dharma which is possible to learn from the European colonisers.

What Gandhi is saying here is that Western Civilisation and Indian civilisation are essentially in essence two very different things. And therefore it is wrong to assume that you can learn one aspect or more than one aspect of one civilisation by following another civilisation, right. So you cannot learn anything about Indian civilisation by following Western Civilisation. Because they were fundamentally incompatible with each other. Thus in his *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi argues, and here again I quote, Gandhi's own words.

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“The tendency of Indian civilisation is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God.”

- *Hind Swaraj* (1909)

The tendency of Indian civilisation is to elevate the moral being that of the Western Civilisation is to propagate immorality. The latter which means the Western Civilisation is godless. The former which means the Indian civilisation is based on a belief in god. Gandhi further states that the essence of this deeply moral and theistic Indian civilisation had been perfected by the ancestors of the modern day Indians.

And, as I said, found true on the unwell of experience. Therefore in India there was nothing to learn from anybody else. Thus according to Gandhi any attempt to emulate Western Civilisation was, for an Indian, tantamount to becoming detached from his or her ancestral heritage and deviating from his or her true identity, what Gandhi considered to be his or her true identity.

And in here we arrive therefore at a fundamental critique of the desire to emulate the coloniser's civilisation which we had detected in the Nationalist Discourse of the 19th century. For Gandhi such an emulation is not a necessary step towards recovering the lost glory of the past. In fact on the contrary, it is regarded by him as a deviation from this path to recovery. Indeed for Gandhi, attempting to imitate the westerners was equivalent to, and he uses this metaphor quite often, it was equivalent to contracting a disease.

And he uses the disease metaphor quite often in *Hind Swaraj* for instance. Contracting a disease. What kind of disease? The disease of the Satanic Western Civilisation. Now Gandhi however argues that the spread of this disease of Western Civilisation in the Indian subcontinent was not complete. I mean the disease had not been able to spread everywhere. But rather it was limited to a specific section of the Indian society.

And which was the section? According to Gandhi this was the section of people who had out of their own moral frailty or own moral shortcoming became enamoured with Western Civilisation and who now sought to get rid of the English so that they could rule over India just like the English. In other words, they were to perpetuate the English rule without the Englishman.

And here again this is really very interesting thing, that Gandhi does in his *Hind Swaraj*, where he is saying that people who have been transformed to the Western Civilisation, Indians were been transformed to the Western Civilisations, how can you really distinguish them from the English colonisers who are oppressing you.

So if the English educated Indian middle class, to which incidentally Gandhi himself belong, if those kind of people come to rule, if those kind of people who were enamoured with Western Civilisation come to rule in India even after throwing out the British, then it would not be very different. Because they had already these Indians had already transformed

themselves through their engagement with the Western Civilisation into, well, Pseudo British, if you would like to call it that.

Now the assertion near the end of Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* about English rule being beneficial for India is therefore turned on its head by Gandhi. For him, a rule by the people who transforms themselves into Englishmen by acquiring their knowledge, was inevitably going to be as foreign as the English rule. Hence the process of regaining the golden past and the true Indian identity of that past did not involve being under Colonial tutelage.

Rather it involved moving away from the fear of influence of Western Civilisation and moving away into the remote villages of the subcontinent where the modern civilisation of the west had not yet been able to penetrate. And this is an important point that Gandhi makes in *Hind Swaraj*. And therefore I would like to quote that section. So this is the voice of the editor.

If you read *Hind Swaraj* you will see that *Hind Swaraj* is basically a dialogue between an editor of a journal who represents the voice of Gandhi and a questioning reader who first comes to the editor representing Gandhi with a lot of scepticism. But then is won over by the logic of the editor, right. So this is the editor speaking.

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“And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before. The inhabitants of that part of India will very properly laugh at your new-fangled notions. The English do not rule over them, nor will you ever rule over them. Those in whose name we speak we do not know, nor do they know us. I would certainly advise you and those like you who love the motherland to go into the interior that has yet not been polluted by the railways, and to live there for six months.”

- Editor in *Hind Swaraj*

And where this cursed modern civilisation has not reached. By modern civilisation Gandhi is referring to what he considered to be the Satanic Western Civilisation. Where this cursed modern civilisation has not reached India remains as it was before. The inhabitants of that

part of India will very properly laugh at your new-fangled notions. The English do not rule over them nor will you ever rule over them.

Now ‘you’ is referred to the reader. But it also refers to the section of people who are, according to Gandhi, who are enamoured with western values and who have therefore tried turning themselves into Englishmen. So Gandhi goes on to say that those in whose name we speak. By ‘we’ he refers to the English educated middle class leadership. Those in whose name we speak we do not know nor do they know us.

“I would certainly advise you and those like you who love the motherland to go into the interior that has yet not been polluted by the railways and to live there for six months.” This statement about not knowing those “in whose name, we speak”. And the appeal to try and connect with them leads to the second point regarding how Gandhi complicated the Nationalist Discourse of the earlier period of the 19th century.

Indian middle class nationalism as it developed during the 19th century was in essence largely Elitist. And as noted earlier for someone like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay for instance becoming a true Hindu/Indian and to regain the glory of the past was to move away from the state of ignorance in which the ordinary Indian has fallen at present. So when I say Elitist I mean I do not want you to get me wrong here.

19th century nationalist leaders had a lot of concern for the masses. But the reason for which I am saying that there was an Elitist angle to this was because the very ideology was based on trying to move up from the present state of degeneration which Indian masses had apparently fallen into. And this elevation according to the 19th century nationalist would be possible through western style education, right.

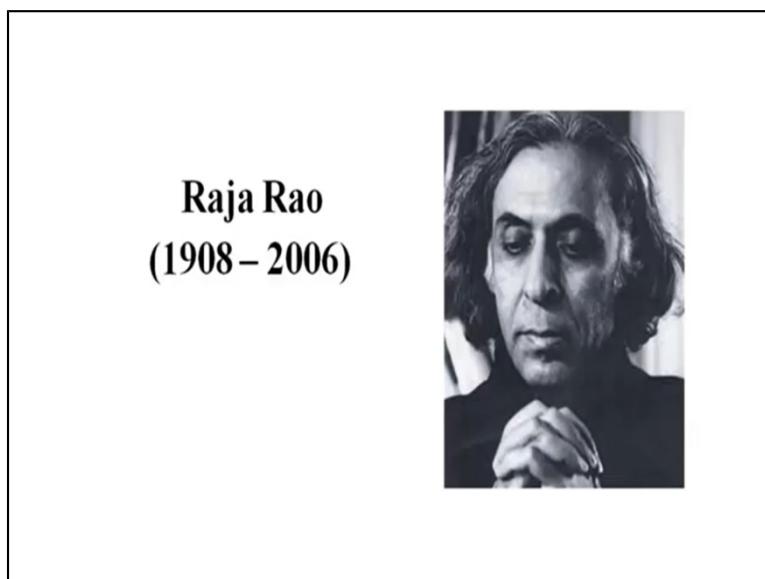
So when I say Elitist I refer to this trend of elevating yourself up from the masses. Because the mass is looked upon as already degenerate representing the degenerate state of present day India. Now in contrast, as the Indian leader, who was most successful in channelizing mass protest against Colonialism, Gandhi repeatedly emphasised the need to integrally connect with the masses in whose name we speak.

Thus rather than trying to elevate oneself from the masses Gandhi's emphasis was unconsciously going down to the level of the villages and the peasants and becoming one with them. In Gandhi's own words the so called upper classes have to learn to live conscientiously and religiously and deliberately the simple peasant life knowing it to be a life giving true happiness.

So as you can see, for Gandhi there is no notion of elevating oneself through western education. Rather it is all about a process of unlearning the influence of the west and going back to the state in which most of India's village population uncontaminated by the Western Civilisation resides in.

So now that we have summed up the basic features of the Gandhian Nationalist Discourse and how its thoughts about Decolonisation differed from those present in the Nationalist Discourse of the 19th century, let us move on to the novel *Kanthapura*, and see how it makes use of this Gandhian discourse. Now *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. And was the first novel of the Indian Author, Raja Rao.

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Raja Rao's dates are 1908 to 2006. So he led a marvellously long life. And he was born in the princely state of Mysore. And spent his early life in Hyderabad. But later on he moved to France to pursue higher studies. And it was here in France that Rao wrote his English novel, *Kanthapura*. Now this novel by Rao can actually be considered as a belonging to that cluster of new Indian English fiction that was coming up in the 1930s.

And indeed Rao was one of the three fiction writers who completely change the course of Indian English novel post 1930s. The other two writers belonging to this group of three are of course Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan. But coming back to the novel *Kanthapura*, though it was written in France it does not contain any trace of Rao's life and experience in that country.

And in fact Raja Rao was going to write about that, his experience in France extensively, later on in his novels like *The Rope and The Serpent* for instance, or the *Chess Master and His Moves*. But, in *Kanthapura* we do not find anything like that. Rather here, we see Rao, engaged with the transformative effect that Gandhi brought about in the social and political lives of Indians during the 1920s and the 1930s.

Now on the one hand, *Kanthapura* is an attempt to represent in fictional form the Gandhian discourse of nationalism which, by the time Rao was writing his novel, had gained a significant amount of traction in India. But on the other hand, *Kanthapura* was also an attempt to trace the fault lines that run through the Gandhian discourse. So the novel is simultaneously a representation and a critique of the Gandhian discourse.

But we will have to come back to this point of critique in our next Lecture. In today's Lecture let us see why *Kanthapura* is so widely recognised as a novel about Gandhi and Gandhianism. Now the main focus of this novel is on a character called Moorthy who journeys to the city from his native village Kanthapura. That is also the name of the novel. And he goes to the city to gain western style university education, right.

So here again we see the career graph of a middle class emerging. But then Moorthy comes back to the village. He comes back without even completing his education. And the novel is primarily about this return. And the Gandhian influence that inspires Moorthy to make this return.

Now as we learn during the course of the novel, Moorthy while in the city, has a grand vision in which he sees Gandhi urging him to give up his foreign clothes and his foreign university education and go back, in the words of the novel, "to the dumb millions of the villages". Now this is of course is an exact echo of the sentiments of Gandhi as expressed in *Hind Swaraj*. And remember, this is a text published in 1938.

But of course, the 1909 publication *Hind Swaraj* is still evident, evidently relevant here. And 1938 *Kanthapura* is equalling 1909 *Hind Swaraj*. And in the way *Kanthapura* equals *Hind Swaraj* we can see Gandhi's version of the cyclical pattern of the golden age fall and return that we have already traced in Derozio and Bankim.

Now in this Gandhian pattern the golden age of civilisation is not represented by a distant past. But rather it is represented by the present generation of Indians who have remained unaffected by the Western Civilisation. These are the people about whom Gandhi talks in the quotation that we have discussed earlier. These are the people of the villages where railways have not yet reached and have not yet connected them to the urban centres where the disease of Western Civilisation is rampant.

Now the fall in this Gandhian pattern is thus a journey to the city where one contracts the disease of the Satanic Civilisation of the west. And as we see in the novel, when Moorthy has his vision of Gandhi, he is already in that diseased state, he is already in the city where Western Civilisation or engagement with the Western Civilisation is rampant.

The return to the golden age in the Gandhian discourse, is in turn, a spatial return to the village. And an attempt to reconnect with the aspects of Indian civilisation which had remained uncontaminated by western values. So the vision of Gandhi that Moorthy has, makes him give up his “Foreign Education”. And I use ‘foreign’ within quotes. Because, whether to consider this really foreign can also be a matter of argument.

So after having this vision of Gandhi, Moorthy gives up his foreign education as well as his foreign clothes that he had obtained in the city. And he returns to his village where he tries to fulfil Gandhi's socio-political agenda by organising the people of Kanthapura, organising them. Not only them in fact but also the people of the nearby Coffee Estate, called the Skeffington Coffee Estate, to wage a non-violent war against the Colonial rule.

Now this effort to organise the villages is not merely political in its intent but also has a social and cultural aspect to it. So Moorthy, while trying to organise the villagers to fight Colonialism, also makes them fight caste segregation as well as some of the segregations that are imposed by patriarchy. Thus in the novel you will see Moorthy himself getting gradually

transformed into a local Gandhi who wages an incessant war not only against Colonialism but also against the social evils which Gandhi considered pernicious to the Indian society.

In our next Lecture we will see how Raja Rao uses his character Moorthy not only to fictionalise the real historical figure of Gandhi but also to criticise Gandhian intervention into the social, political, and cultural lives of Indians. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #12
Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (II)

Welcome back to this course on postcolonial literature

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**Raja Rao's
Kanthapura (1938)**

Today we will continue with our discussion of Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*. Now as we remember we are reading Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* vis-a-vis the Gandhian discourse of nationalism and decolonisation. And in our previous discussion we had primarily focused on two aspects of the Gandhian discourse. The first of these two aspects is the notion of a return to the village.

Now you remember that for Gandhi the journey to reconnect oneself with the glorious India of the precolonial past involved a turning away from the urban centres where one is exposed to the "Corrupting influence of the Western Civilisation" and return back to the villages where the traditional Indian ways of life had remained unaffected by the colonial intervention. So this trope of return is very significant in the Gandhian discourse of nationalism.

But there is also another aspect. And this second aspect which again we had discussed in a previous meeting, is about Gandhi's insistence to make nationalism mass based to connect with the masses, right. So for Gandhi, the nationalist project of creating a decolonised future for India for instance, was not the solitary affairs of English educated individuals from the middle class who were engaged in an attempt to elevate themselves through their learning the code of their coloniser's civilisation.

Rather for Gandhi, it was not this alleviation that informed the true path of nationalism. But rather it was an attempt to go down to the level of the masses and to reconnect with them. So these are the two aspects, the two salient aspects of Gandhian discourse, that we had talked about. And I had also said that Moorthy, who is a central character in Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*, initially appears in the novel as an embodiment of both these two aspects of the Gandhian discourse.

Thus for instance, the novel tells us about Moorthy's return to his native village Kanthapura from the city where he had gone to study in a university. Moorthy has a vision of Gandhi while he is in the city. And this vision convinces him that his university education is "Foreign". And his cloths too are foreign. And this realisation makes Moorthy promptly give up both his university education as well as his foreign clothes and return to the dumb millions of the villages.

This is how Gandhi speaks of the villages in his *Hind Swaraj* if you remember. Now in the novel Moorthy's return to Kanthapura is also connected with the Gandhian notion of making nationalism mass based. Because Moorthy's arrival in Kanthapura leads him to organise the people of his village as well as the nearby Skeffington coffee estate into a non-violent struggle against the colonial Authority.

And his efforts to reform the village society earns him the reputation of being a local Gandhi a local saint who replicates the figure of Gandhi for the villagers. Thus Moorthy's portrayal in this novel not only brings together the various traits of Gandhian ideology but also beautifully presents in a fictional form the charisma and the appeal of the figure of Gandhi as a mass leader.

But today I will argue that in this novel Raja Rao also introduces a strong element of criticism of the Gandhian Discourse. And this note of criticism, though it is subtle, yet nevertheless it is all pervasive in the novel. So today the Lecture will primarily focus on this subtle but all pervasive critique of Gandhian Ideology and Gandhian Discourse that informs the novel *Kanthapura* and to understand this element of criticism that is there in Raja Rao's novel.

Let us go back to the two points that we have already discussed. First, the return to the village. And second, the mass based Nationalism. And let us see how *Kanthapura* both represents these two aspects of the Gandhian Discourse and also undermines them, undercuts them, criticises them. So let us start for instance with Moorthy's return to the village. If you read the novel you will see that the narrator that Raja Rao uses in *Kanthapura* is an elderly Brahmin lady of the village Kanthapura.

And her name is Achakka. And it is important to remember the fact that *Kanthapura* is narrated by someone like Achakka. And the reason for this is because Raja Rao uses the perspective of this elderly village lady Achakka to subtly undercut the Gandhianism that Moorthy represents. And we see this in play quite early in the novel when Achakka introduces to the readers her native village and its inhabitants.

So while talking about the Brahmin quarters, and she talks about these distinct caste-based quarters that form the village geography. And we will return to these caste segregations later on in our discussion today. But Achakka, while describing the residents of the Brahmin quarters, talks about a character called Dore. And who is Dore? Well, Dore is a young man, who is from Kanthapura but who had left his native village and had gone of the city to become a university graduate.

And Achakka tells us that though he was not very successful in his studies Dore picked up quite a few new habits while he was in the city. So he had, in Achakka's words, developed city ways, read city books, and even called himself a Gandhi man. Now this repeated stress on the word, City, both shows an effort by Achakka to underline the foreignness of these new ways and new books to which Dore was exposed in the city.

And also this repeated stress conveys a sense of disapproval on the part of Achakka. Now this should immediately remind us of Gandhi's own characterisation of the western style university and the foreign ways of the city as evils that Indians should shun so as to escape from the corrupting influence of the Satanic Western Civilisation. And so far Gandhian Discourse and Achakka's point of view are almost the same.

But the irony here is of course that Achakka also classifies Dore's becoming a Gandhi man as a new-fangled idea that he gets from the city. So from Achakka's perspective, Gandhianism, just like the city ways and the city books, is a thing that Dore picks up after he moves out of the ambit of his native village.

So ironically the very city which the Gandhian Discourse of Nationalism presented as the den of vices and diseases is in *Kanthapura* presented as a space where young villagers like Dore gets exposed to the Gandhian ideals, and they turn themselves into foreigners who are hardly recognisable by elderly villagers like Achakka. And therefore Achakka's contempt for this Gandhi man Dore who adopted city ways and city habits is unequivocal.

Now the reason I dwelt on this assessment of Dore by Achakka at such great length is not because Dore plays a very significant role in this novel. He is not a very significant character. In fact he is hardly mentioned after these first pages. But Dore's significance the reference to Dore, the significance of that, lies in the fact that immediately after expressing her displeasure regarding him Achakka introduces the character of Moorthy for the first time.

So after this description of Dore Achakka then immediately after that goes on to describe Moorthy. And Moorthy is introduced to the reader for the first time. And in contrast to Dore Achakka praises Moorthy highly. Now we must remember here that the career graph of Moorthy is almost an exact replica of Dore's in the sense that just like Dore Moorthy too went away from the village to the city to pursue the foreign university education.

And he also just like Dore came under Gandhian influence in the city and became a Gandhi man which eventually resulted in his return to the village. But as I mentioned, Achakka's attitude towards Moorthy is in sharp contrast to her attitude towards Dore. So whereas Dore earns her displeasure, Moorthy is highly praised for leading his life in almost the exact same way.

And the reason for this is not because Achakka takes a different view towards Moorthy's Gandhianism. But rather, and this becomes very clear in how Achakka tells us about Moorthy. Her approval of Moorthy comes from the fact that Moorthy was a childhood friend of Achakka's own son, Seenu. Indeed rather than praising Moorthy for becoming one of the Gandhi man, villagers like Achakka at least in the initial stage, remains thoroughly sceptical about the changes that Moorthy seeks to make in the village to spread the ideals of Gandhi.

So to understand this skepticism let us look at a few instances. Let us take for instance Moorthy's attempt to popularise the use of Charka among the villagers. Now the Charka and the weaving of Khadi were perhaps the most important Gandhian symbols of the return to Indianess and the boycotting of the Satanic Western Civilisation in the Gandhian Discourse. So Gandhi's call therefore to weave Khadi was always accompanied by his call to do away with the foreign made clothes.

And indeed Moorthy's return to the village from the city is initiated by his burning in a bonfire his foreign clothes along with his foreign university books. But his return to Kanthapura does not automatically mean that he returns to a life where the Charka and where weaving of the Khadi is predominant. In fact when Moorthy asks the villagers to shun the foreign clothes and to weave Khadi for themselves a character called Nanjamma points out Moorthy that Brahmins do not spin and that such spinning is properly the occupation of the weaver caste. Now here in Nanjamma's opposition to weaving we come across a significant point which complicates our understanding of the Gandhian return as represented by Moorthy. Moorthy's activism in the village is strongly characterised by his opposition to the system of caste segregation. In fact Moorthy spends almost as much time trying to break various caste taboos as he is trying to mobilise the villagers for the Anticolonial cause.

This makes Moorthy confront age old caste prejudices around which the entire village life is organised. And this is evident even in the way Achakka introduces the village in the first pages of the novel. So for instance, as I told you, that Achakka introduces the village landscape as divided into various quarters inhabited by specific castes. So the village is a unity which has a number of segregating lines separating one caste from the other.

Indeed when the character Bhatta, and we will talk about Bhatta more later. So Bhatta is the Village Priest and the Moneylender. And he also becomes the sort of primary enemy the arch enemy of Moorthy in the novel. So when he also criticises Moorthy his criticism is based on the fact that Moorthy is attacking the age-old traditional caste system.

So Moorthy's return to the village is therefore marked less by the desire to accept the traditional ethos of the village life and more by the desire to transform the village population into a homogeneous mass which can then be directed against the colonial Authority. Thus the story of Moorthy's return is not that of his smooth integration into the village which is otherwise so exalted in the Gandhian Discourse as the repository of the true Indian way of life.

Rather the story is of Moorthy disrupting the regular pattern of the village life in Kanthapura. And this is not only evident in his efforts to break the various caste taboos but also in his efforts to politically mobilise the women and bring them out of the domestic confines which the patriarchal way of the village life imposes on them.

Thus we see Moorthy's Anticolonial movement foreground a figure like Ratna who, as a young widow, with a mind of her own is detested by the patriarchal order of Kanthapura and is shunned as a "Concubine". So, here again we see Moorthy to be a disruptive and even foreign influence in the village life. And rather than he returning as a prodigal son who tries to assimilate himself into the existing rhythm of the village life, Moorthy emerges as a major force which destroys many of the age-old practices that held the village together.

But here I need to clarify that I am not judging any of Moorthy's actions here in terms of whether they were morally the right things to do or not. What I am trying to point out is that Moorthy's physical return to the village cannot be interpreted as a simplistic assimilation into the village life. In fact Moorthy's desire to transform the village to which he returns and his efforts to confront the evils of caste segregation and of patriarchy renders questionable the very idea of return.

So we are confronted with a question like is the return to a golden age possible just by physically going back to the village life which has largely remained untouched by the colonial influence even though it is written by caste and gender discrimination. Now here you

see what Raja Rao is doing. Chinua Achebe is going to do the exact same thing in his *Things Fall Apart*.

Because, like Achebe's novel, *Kanthapura* too brings out the fault lines that already plague the traditional indigenous society even when it is bereft of the corrupting influence of colonialism. Thus these two novels, both *Kanthapura* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, make the notion of a simplistic return problematic as a decolonisation strategy. Now I would like to end this discussion on *Kanthapura* by talking about how apart from the idea of return the novel also criticises the Gandhian attempt to make Anticolonial Nationalism mass based.

Now a superficial reading of the novel will perhaps convince the reader that Moorthy does manage to kindle within the villagers a spirit of Nationalism and transform them into a united opposition to the colonial authority by breaking the behaviours of caste segregation and patriarchal narrowness. A careful reading will reveal that the force of opposition and resistance that Moorthy kindles within the villagers does not automatically get directed against the British rule.

But before we discuss the complex dynamics of this Anticolonial movement that happens within the village of Kanthapura, let us for a moment consider the Skeffington coffee estate. Because there too Moorthy manages to organise an Anticolonial resistance. Now the Skeffington coffee estate, we are told, is run by a British. And the novel describes how Indians from all over the country are brought there with false promises and are then forced to work there almost as bonded labourers.

So in other words, the coffee estate is presented as a site of barbaric violence and exploitation where the line distinguishing between the British colonial exploiter and the poor Indian exploited is very clearly drawn. It is unmistakable. So Moorthy's call to resist the oppressions of the authority of the exploitative White man finds ready acceptance among the labourers of the coffee estate. And they almost immediately rise to the occasion.

But if you compare this with the village of Kanthapura there we see that the patterns of oppression are more complex. And though Moorthy tries to convince the villagers that the White man is exploiting them economically, for the villagers the more real face of economic exploitation is the Moneylender Bhatta for instance. And now the problem here is that the

Bhatta is not only not a British coloniser he is also not a foreigner or even a city bred man. In fact as a village priest he is thoroughly integrated within the structure of the village life.

And Moorthy's discourse of Anticolonial Nationalism fails to address the exploitation that someone like Bhatta carries out. So in other words, though Moorthy recognises the economic exploitation, that goes on between the coloniser and the colonised, he remains at this stage in the novel, impervious to the class exploitation that goes on between one Indian and another.

So almost throughout the novel Moorthy's focus primarily remains on talking about the colonial exploitation which happens between the British coloniser and the subjugated Indians. But he does not really think through the exploitation of one Indian by another which is a class exploitation. Thus when in Chapter 15 an elderly lady asks Moorthy whether his fight for freedom is going to free her from the exploitation of an Indian Revenue Collector, who beats his own wife and who also coerces the whole village, Moorthy is at a loss for answer. Hence while reading the novel one is never very sure whether the villagers, I mean, whether they do rise and resist the oppression. But we are left slightly unsure whether this villagers' resistance that Moorthy organises is directed at the White man's government which for most of the villagers remain a distant entity or is it directed to the more immediate Indian exploiters like Bhatta, for instance, or the Revenue Collector.

Because after all, in spite of Moorthy's elaborate explanation of the ways in which the White man is economically exploiting the villagers, for people like Ratna for instance or Rangamma, they find the most pleasure when they see the granary of Bhatta going up in flames. Because it is Bhatta and not any White man who lends them money at exorbitant rates and who starves them and their children of food.

So the anger is very much directed at certain Indians like Bhatta for instance. And therefore within a colonial society oppression is not merely evident in the relation between the British and the Indian but also informs the class relations of one Indian to the other. Now the novel in fact ends with Moorthy realising this class difference and class exploitation as one of the major sources of crisis in the Indian society.

And thus as an Anticolonial activist we see that he finally changes his affiliation from Gandhian idealism to the Nehruvian dream of Realitarianism. And Moorthy therefore, I mean

though this novel, is usually read as a Gandhian novel as almost a propaganda of Gandhian idealism. At the end of the novel we actually see the central character Moorthy transforming into a Nehruvian character and shifting his allegiance from Gandhi to Nehru.

So here we end our discussion on *Kanthapura*. And in our next Lecture we will discuss Rabindranath Tagore and Frantz Fanon. And we will look into their distinct criticisms of the Middle Class led Anticolonial Nationalism. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

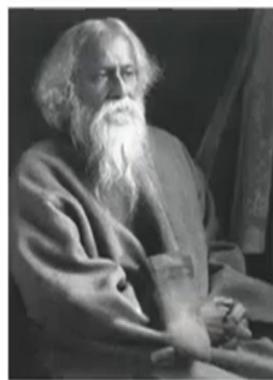
Lecture No. #13
Critics of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and Frantz Fanon

Hello and welcome back to this lecture series on postcolonial literature. Now, in all our previous discussions about decolonisation, we had assumed that the quest for decolonisation ends in a nation-state. That is to say that decolonisation not only involves the creation of a national community but it also involves the creation of a sovereign political entity or a state.

So, in today's lecture I want to talk about two individuals who in spite of their being engaged with the politics of anti-colonialism, were among the staunchest critics of the idea of nation-state. And we have to remember here that by the 20th century, the idea of nation-state as the goal of freedom was accepted almost universally through the colonised world. But these two people, that I am going to discuss today, one is Rabindranath Tagore and the other is Frantz Fanon, they spoke against this general consensus which, as I told you, was almost universally accepted by the 20th century. And now that most of the erstwhile colonies have emerged as nation-states, I think we should pay all the more attention to the criticism that these two intellectual giants directed against the formation of nation-states, or in fact, the very idea of nation. So let's start with Rabindranath Tagore.

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Rabindranath Tagore
(1861 – 1941)



Now, Tagore was born in Calcutta in 1861 in an illustrious Bengali family which was not only known for its wealth but also known for its involvement with the socio-religious reform movement called Brahmoism. Tagore's own involvement with various issues pertaining to social reform began quite early in his life and by his 20's, Tagore was already the author of several essays commenting on the burning social and political issues of the day.

Indeed, in the first decade of the 20th century, Tagore emerged as one of the tallest leaders of the Swadeshi movement. And Swadeshi movement, as most of you will know, was the first middle class led, mass-based, anti-colonial movement in India and Tagore emerged as one of its tallest leaders during the early days. Today, of course, Tagore is best remembered as a literary figure and, more specifically, as the author of the national anthems of two nation-states.

One is, of course, India and the other is Bangladesh. And these two countries, India and Bangladesh, emerged as nation-states from the once colonised part of the globe. But given this strong association that we form in our mind between Tagore and nation-state, it might come as a surprise that Tagore proclaimed, and here I am quoting his exact words:

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"Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles." This quotation is from his essay titled "Nationalism in India," which, along with two other pieces titled "Nationalism in the West" and "Nationalism in Japan," forms a kind of a triptych, which were, sort of these three essays, were printed

“Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles.”

- “Nationalism in India”

together in 1971 in the form of a book which was titled *Nationalism*. Initially, they were delivered as lectures, all of these three essays.

In our discussion today, we will be focusing on these essays on nationalism to try and understand some of the major features of Tagore's radical antinationalist stance. Now, it is important to remember here that unlike Gandhi's views on anti-colonial nationalism, which once he had stated them in his 1909 publication *Hind Swaraj*, remained almost entirely unchanged throughout his life, Tagore's engagement with the ideology of nationalism passed through various phases.

And, the period between 1905 and 1907 can be used as a watershed moment here because these were the years during which Tagore was most actively involved in the anti-colonial nationalist movement or the Swadeshi movement. Now, the years leading up to the Swadeshi movement, the years leading up to 1905, can be regarded as Tagore's pro-nationalism period.

But post 1907, post- (that is to say) Tagore's withdrawal from the Swadeshi movement, (the Swadeshi movement continued well beyond 1907) but Tagore stopped being part of the movement from around 1907 and after this period we encounter, in Tagore's writings, a person who has become thoroughly disillusioned with the Indian nationalist movement in particular, and with the ideas of nationalism and nation-state in general.

The 1917 essays on Nationalism are generally considered as among the most elaborate commentaries by this later Tagore, this post 1907 Tagore, on the idea of nation and its

inherent problems. But before we start exploring these problems, that Tagore mentions, let us pay attention to how he defines nation in the first place. So the question here is what is nation according to Tagore.

In the essay "Nationalism in India," Tagore categorically mentions that his opposition is not to any one particular nation or the other but rather his opposition is to the general idea of all nations, which he defines as, and I quote, "The aspect of a whole people as an organised power." This means that for Tagore nation does not simply mean or does not simply refer to a sense of community and to a sense of fellow feeling but it also refers to the organised power structure of a state that a national community seeks to acquire for itself.

So when a national community acquires for itself the trappings of political power it is that sort of bringing together of nation and state that we know as nation-state, right. So, for Tagore, nation always means nation-state. So if you are reading Tagore's essays, Tagore doesn't use the word nation-state but he uses the word nation.

But in order to understand his criticism you will need to understand that, for Tagore, nation is always, or almost always, nation-state. Now, this definition of nation as nation-state becomes clearer if we look at his other essay, "Nationalism in the West," where Tagore states, and again I quote, "A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes, when organised for a mechanical purpose."

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So according to Tagore, as this quotation makes clear, nation is not just any union of people

“A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose.”

- “Nationalism in the West”

but rather it is specifically a political and economic union. In other words, it is a state. But the question here is- why does Tagore refer to this union which we can use a shorthand version 'nation-state' to refer to? Why does he refer to nation-state as something which is organised for a mechanical purpose?

And this is crucial if we want to understand Tagore's criticism of nation and nationalism because Tagore frequently uses the trope of machine and he uses the adjective mechanical, quite frequently, to attack the idea of nation. So let us try and understand. Well, first of all, what is a machine? A machine is something that is created, to achieve some very specific purpose, right.

So, therefore in a mechanical process, everything else is subservient to that one specific purpose for which a machine is fine-tuned, okay. So, but for Tagore, a nation-state works just like a machine which has been fine-tuned for a specific purpose and what is this specific purpose? Well, according to Tagore, it is the purpose of creating maximum economic profit.

Now, as you can see, in this definition, the political unit of nation-state is seen as inherently connected with the capitalist mode of economy and its profit-making imperatives. And in making this connection, Tagore is not entirely wrong because in the modern West the rise of nation-state is inextricably connected with the development of capitalism. Therefore, Tagore not only connects nation-state with the capitalist mode of economy but also with the West.

And, in turn, he argues that because the idea of nation-state is western, it is a western importation, it is incompatible with our Indian tradition. Now, according to Tagore, this alien idea of nation-state, by organising the human community for the purpose of material production and profit-making, transforms individuals into one-dimensional men whose only reason for existence is perceived as the creation of surplus wealth.

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“... the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value.”

- “Nationalism in the West”

In Tagore's words, I quote, “the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value.” Now, this creates a number of problems. Firstly, nation as a machine disregards the aspects of human being which are superfluous to the idea of profit making. So, for instance, the natural human tendency for altruism or self-sacrifice is disregarded, according to Tagore, by the machinery of the nation-state because self-sacrifice is not plugged into the process of profit-making in spite of the fact that altruism and self-sacrifice forms the higher nature of a human being.

So, as I told you, the first problem with nation as machine is it disregards a very significant aspect of what it means to be a human. In fact, according to Tagore, it disregards completely the higher nature of a man.

Secondly, man's position within the national machinery reverses the natural relation between man and machine and actually curtails his freedom rather than enhancing it. Tagore explains this point with reference to man's relationship to an automobile, for instance. Now, automobile can give man the freedom of mobility because the man is free to direct it and guide its movement.

But as a machine automobile does not automatically ensure this freedom. For instance, it will not ensure this freedom if the human mind guiding it, guiding the automobile, is not free. Now, nation, by making man useful and relevant only as a producer and consumer of surplus value, actually makes man un-free because in such a scenario it is the national machinery which is guiding the existence of human beings and not the other way around.

So it is national machinery which is organised towards profit-making, which is geared towards profit-making, which transforms human nature and which dictates human life rather than it being the other way around. So, it is like automobile directing your movement rather than you directing the movement of your car. As I said, this is the second point. Let us come to the third point.

Third point is that, nation as a machine, fine-tuned for profit-making, disturbs the sense of balance which should be at the core of human existence and this, I would like to quote from Tagore to explain this point because Tagore does it really beautifully. And here is what Tagore says.

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“In all our physical appetites we recognize a limit. [...] But in the economic world our appetites follow no other restrictions but those of supply and demand which can be artificially fostered, affording individuals opportunities for indulgence in an endless feast of grossness.”

- “Nationalism in India”

“In all our physical appetites, we recognise a limit. But in the economic world, our appetites follow no other restrictions, but those of supply and demand, which can be artificially fostered, affording individuals opportunities for indulgence, in an endless feast of grossness.” So, the national machinery, by prioritising this economic appetite, takes away all sense of moral limits and consequently robs an individual of his higher nature and makes him an incomplete man.

Now, apart from this mechanical nature, Tagore also directs his criticism at the essence of aggressive competition which underlines the idea of nation and nation-states. And this is the second major point of this criticism. The first major point was nation as a machine, right. We have discussed its various problems.

The second major point of Tagore’s criticism is that nation is, or is imbued, with the inherent spirit of aggressive competition. So, according to Tagore, the organisation of humanity in the forms of nation-states which is geared at making more and more material profit and, I quote him.

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“Goads all its neighbouring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy, and by the fear of each other's growth into powerfulness. The time comes when it can stop no longer, for the competition grows keener, organisation grows vaster, and selfishness attains supremacy.”

“... goads all its neighbouring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy, and by the fear of each other's growth into powerfulness. The time comes when it can stop no longer, for the competition grows keener, organization grows vaster, and selfishness attains supremacy.”

- “Nationalism in the West”

Now, if you remember, our discussion on the scramble for Africa that broke out between the European nation-states in the 1880s, you will see that, it is the spirit of aggressive economic competition between nations which was largely responsible for the evils of 19th and early 20th century colonialism.

And, according to Tagore, in a world where greater geographical connectivity is daily bringing people into closer proximity, if nation-state with its aggressive competitiveness remains the primary mode of organising humanity, then the world can only end in an arms race leading to a sort of conflagration of suicide. That is how Tagore describes it.

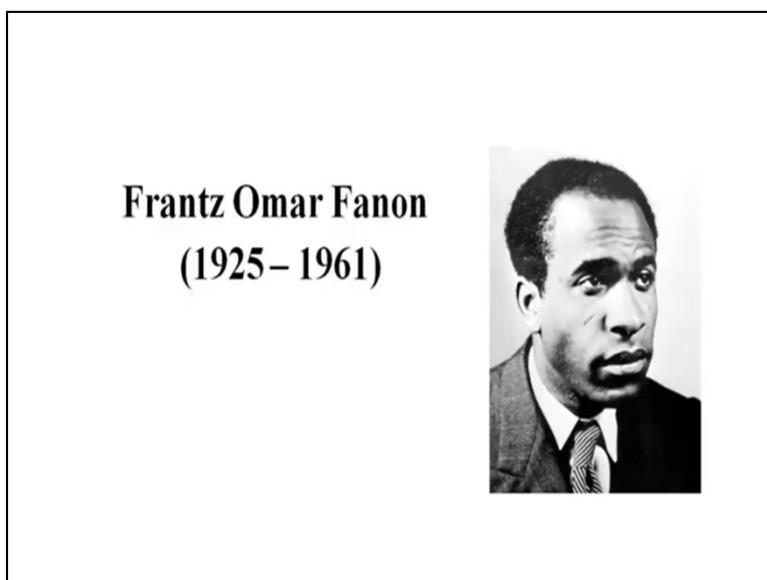
So, to recapitulate, Tagore’s criticism of nationalism and nation-state is two-fold. His first argument is that nation-state, by mechanically organising people for the sole purpose of profit-making, destroys the human depth of an individual and kills his higher nature which is characterised not by a desire to make profit but by altruism and self-sacrifice.

Tagore’s second argument is that the spirit of competition and selfishness that informs the idea of nation makes it an unsuitable model for a modern world where the distance between individuals and communities is ever reducing, and where there is an ever greater need for humanity to come together as a universal brotherhood. Now, if we carefully read Tagore’s essays on nationalism, we will see that at the core of his criticism is a capitalist mode of economy because both the concept of profit-making and the concept of aggressive competitiveness are ultimately associated with that mode of economic production, isn’t it.

But the problem is that this attack on capitalism, per say, is never clearly spelt out by Tagore. It remains all pervasive but it remains very subtle.

In the writings of Frantz Fanon, however, the economic criticism of middle class led nationalism is more clearly visible.

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Now, Fanon was born in the French colony of Martinique which is in the Caribbean. But he moved to France at the age of 18 to fight in the second world war and after the war was over, he studied psychiatry. And then later joined the psychiatric ward of a hospital as a doctor in Algeria.

And it was in Algeria that Fanon became involved with the Algerian anti-colonial movement against the French colonial rule. Now, though Fanon died in 1961 at the young age of 36 within this very short lifespan he had authored two very influential books.

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The first one is *Black Skin, White Masks*, that is its English title and the second is titled *The Wretched of the Earth*, in English. And both of these texts have now become canonical, even in the field of Postcolonial studies. In our discussion of Fanon today, we will be focusing on the later of the two books, *The Wretched of the Earth*, which was first published in French in 1961 and, more specifically, we will be looking at the section titled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness."

• *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

• *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

And, we will be looking at its criticism on the role of the middle class version of nationalism, and its relation with decolonisation. Now, in this text, Fanon argues that though the middle class nationalist leaders play a significant role in the anti-colonial struggle, the moment the nation becomes independent, they cease to exercise their role as a revolutionary class.

Now, as I have discussed earlier, the process of European colonialism of Africa was guided by the requirements of the Industrial Revolution that took place there. Which means that the African colonies were used as sites to procure raw materials to feed the industries in the colonial mother country and within this scheme of things, the colonial periphery, which is Africa, is therefore- and any colonial periphery, not only Africa, also a colonial periphery like India, which acted as a site of procuring raw material, they remained industrially backward, industrially deficient, compared to the metropolis because that is how the economy was arranged. The metropolis was where the industry was concentrated in and the colonial periphery, places like Africa, for instance, or India, acted as, served as places from where the colonisers procured the raw materials and then dumped the finished goods in.

So, we were both the suppliers of the raw materials and we were also the market for the finished product. But the industrial production took place in the mother country. And therefore, places like Africa and India remained, throughout the colonial period, industrially deficient. Now, Fanon states that ideally the middle class, which leads a country to independence, should re-organise the means of production of that country, so as to end its dependence on the metropolis.

In other words, to break this relationship between the periphery as a supplier of raw material and the mother country as the site of industrial production. But Fanon argues that, after independence, the middle class does not take any such revolutionary steps to reform the means of production and initiate a process of egalitarian distribution of the country's resources. Rather the middle class, having fought off the European colonisers, come to occupy the very positions of those departed colonisers.

And here we are reminded of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* because, if you remember, Gandhi was also making a similar argument in *Hind Swaraj* when he was saying that, okay, if we send away the English, what kind of governance are we going to have. And, if the answer is that the English educated middle class, who fashion themselves after the colonisers, they will take over, according to Gandhi, it will just be the English rule, the continuation of the British colonial rule without the Englishman, right.

And, Fanon here, is making a similar argument in 1961. Now, as Fanon said that, because the middle class merely takes over the positions of power from the departing colonisers, they do not reform the colonial mode of economic exploitation. They do not dismantle the colonial mode of economic exploitation which is already there.

Indeed, because the middle class fails to industrialise the newly independent country, it continues to remain the supplier of unprocessed raw materials to the industries of the mother country even after independence. So Fanon describes this economic dependence and continuing exploitation of the colonial periphery by the metropolis, even after political independence, as a new form of colonialism, which he terms as neo-colonialism.

Now, in this economic relationship between the metropolis and the periphery, the middle class of the newly independent country merely acts as intermediaries or as the middleman through whom the economic exploitation is channelized and who, in turn, gets a share of the loot, right.

So, the relation of economic exploitation, which existed during colonialism between the mother country and the colonial periphery, continues, according to Fanon, even after independence with the only change being that the middle class, who led the anti-colonial

movement, now occupies an intermediary position, the position of the middleman, who channelizes and who sort of organises this exploitation and benefits from it.

Thus, though anti-colonial struggle is organised and led by the middle class in places like India and Africa in the name of nationalism, there is seen a very little attempt to really forge a national community by elevating the masses through revolutionising the mode of economic production and through an egalitarian distribution of resources.

Fanon also argues that this failure of the middle class to form a truly national economy and a truly national community, leads to a degeneration and perversion of the nationalist discourse which soon becomes the discourse of racist chauvinism, which is used by one African community to separate itself and to exert an asserted supremacy over another African community.

It is used by one African tribe to distinguish itself and assert its supremacy over another African tribe. Thus, the bulwark of African unity, which won the anti-colonial struggle, soon disappears and it gives way to a thoroughly fragmented landscape which might have become formally independent but which still remains a site of neo-colonial exploitation.

So, whereas Tagore argues in 1917, that nation should not be the model of socio-political organisation that we should adopt when we formally do away with colonialism, Fanon writing in 1961, argues that nation under the middle class leadership remains an unworkable model in the ex-colonies.

Thus, clearly, in spite of the current prevalence of nation-states in the once colonised parts of the world, there is a real scope to think through the problems of the postcolonial human community in a new way. In our next Lecture, we will take up the writings of Homi Bhabha, to see how this leading postcolonial theorist, helps us re-conceptualise the world order beyond the narrow confines of the nation-state. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #14
Homi Bhabha and the Concept of Cultural Hybridity

Hello and welcome back to this lecture series on postcolonial literature. Now, we had ended our previous lecture by discussing Rabindranath Tagore's and Frantz Fanon's criticism of the idea, though we had also discussed how nation-state had become the norm by the second half of the 20th century in the parts of the world which was once colonised by the European powers.

Which means that independence movements in places like Africa for instance, or in the Indian subcontinent, almost automatically led to the formation of nation-state. Now, but in the conclusion I had suggested that the criticism of Tagore and Fanon of nation and nationalism also compels us to look beyond the present political norm of nation-states. Now nation-state is almost a political norm in the world. Right.

But as we have seen that there are very powerful critics of this idea of nation-state and nationalism and these critics like Tagore and Fanon compel us to look beyond the category of nation-state. And we will make this attempt today by exploring the works of Homi Bhabha and see if we can arrive at an alternative understanding of postcolonial human community beyond the category of nation-state.

Now our starting point in this exploration today will be the concept of hybridity which plays a central role in Bhabha's work. And after we discuss hybridity, we will then move on to another very important concept in Bhabha which is mimicry. And then finally we will revisit the idea of nation and nationalism. But before we start discussing the writings of Bhabha, let me introduce to you Homi Bhabha in a few words.

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Homi K. Bhabha
(1949 –)



Bhabha was born in 1949 in the Parsi community of Bombay. And he did his graduation from the University of Bombay before moving to the University of Oxford as a postgraduate student. And there he completed his Masters as well as his Doctorate. He started his teaching career in the United Kingdom but then moved on to America. And he is now the Anne F. Rothenberg Chair professor in humanities in the University of Harvard.

Now Bhabha is often regarded as part of the “Holy Trinity” in the field of postcolonial studies with the other two figures being Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. We have already discussed Edward Said in our previous Lectures and we will take up Gayatri Spivak in the lectures that follows. But coming back to Bhabha, his most influential work of postcolonial theory is the collection of essays titled *The Location of Culture* which was originally published in 1994.

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- *The Location of Culture* (1994)
- “The Black Savant and the Dark Princess” (2006)
- “On Global Memory: Reflections on Barbaric Transmission” (2009)
- “Beyond Photography” (2011)

And though Bhabha has subsequently authored a number of other important works like “The Black Savant and the Dark Princess”, “On Global Memory”, and “Beyond Photography”, he is primarily known for *The Location of Culture*. And in today’s lecture we will be exclusively focusing on this particular collection of essays to understand the theoretical position that Bhabha takes.

Now in our earlier discussion on the colonial discourse, we have seen how colonialism is constructed by the Europeans as a civilising mission in which a superior culture of the metropolitan West comes in contact with the “inferior culture” of the colonised periphery. This superior/inferior binary indicates that in spite of the colonial contact, the culture and civilisation of the Western coloniser, and of the colonised East were perceived as two distinct and separate entities.

And this perception is perhaps most clearly stated in that famous opening line of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The Ballad of East and West”, I have already quoted this line in one of my earlier lectures but I am going to quote it again now, the line is of course: “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”. And as I said, this line is perhaps the best expression of the notion that in spite of the colonial contact, the Western civilisation and Western culture of the coloniser was distinct and superior to the culture and civilizational values of the colonised East. Now this notion of distinct cultural essences separating the coloniser and the colonised also informs the kind of middle class nationalist discourse that we have studied earlier from within the context of India.

Indeed the cyclical pattern of fall and recovery, which should be very familiar to you by now, which underlines the nationalist discourse is pivoted on the notion of distinctive and pure cultural identities. As we have seen earlier, the lament of someone like M.K. Gandhi for instance, is that India under the colonial influence has lost its distinctive culture and its native inhabitants are busy imitating the culture of the colonisers which is completely alien to them.

In the cyclical pattern underlying the Gandhian nationalist discourse therefore, the notion of return and the recovery which is crucial as you will know signifies a reverting back to the civilizational values of a precolonial past which represents an era of cultural purity. Now against this idea of a pure culture which can be distinguished and kept separated from another foreign culture and which can be reverted back to, against this Bhabha proposes the idea of cultural hybridity.

Now since Bhabha's concept of hybridity is complex and at the same time it is central to the field of postcolonial studies, let us go through it carefully step by step. Now, in order to understand Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, we need to understand that for Bhabha culture is not a static entity. For him it is not an essence that can be fixed in time and space. On the contrary, culture for Bhabha is something which is fluid, something which is perpetually in motion. It is a melting pot of several disparate elements which are regularly being added and which are regularly transforming our cultural identities. So for Bhabha, there is for instance no pure Indianness or Africanness or Britishness that can be grasped, studied, or even returned to.

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And to understand what I mean here, let us consider for example the famous European anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski who travelled in the early 20th century to the islands of Papua New Guinea to study the natives in their “original” setting. Now Malinowski’s writings on these natives represent them as the possessor of a distinct culture which has remained uncontaminated by any foreign influence. And if we look at this picture of Malinowski sitting with Papuan islanders, it is easy to believe both in the pure uncontaminated nature of their aboriginal culture and the distinction separating them from the culture of the white man who is sitting between them. But as we know Bhabha would contend that such a notion of pure uncontaminated culture is a myth. All culture is characterised by a mixedness which Bhabha refers to by the word hybridity.

But how can the culture of these “remote” Papuan islanders be contaminated in any way? Well another modern day anthropologist James Clifford, in his essay “Travelling Cultures”, takes up this case of Malinowski and he writes that Malinowski’s portrayal of the Papuan culture as pure, static, unchanging, and uncontaminated is an illusion. And such illusions about pure uncontaminated cultures are carefully constructed not only by Malinowski but almost by all anthropologists writing about their field studies on dwellers of spaces far removed from the West. And the illusion is created there for instance by stressing on the isolation of the field which the anthropologist goes to study. This, for instance, is done by leaving away details about how the Western anthropologist himself or herself travels to that distant location.

Because a detailed account of the travel, will immediately destroy the notion of isolation and cultural uncontaminatedness. Why? Because it will connect the anthropological field with the metropolitan centre. Because at the end of the day the Western anthropologist himself or herself is travelling and by travelling is actually connecting the metropolitan centre to that distant location which is removed from the West.

Now, in other words, if the anthropologist managed to find his or her way to the field of study then that field of study cannot but be connected to other places. And consequently its culture cannot but be influenced by and mixed with other cultures which is very obvious because if someone can travel into a particular space, it means that travel is possible. And the moment travel is possible then we conceive that space not as an isolated area but as an area which is interconnected with other places and not only in terms of physical interconnectedness but

also in terms of cultural interconnectedness. So the notion of cultural isolation and uncontaminated cultural purity crumbles down here if we think of how the anthropologist has physically travelled to that distant location which is his or her feet.

But the notion of cultural isolation and cultural purity also crumbles if we remember that the anthropologist is communicating with the inhabitants of his or her field of study in some way or the other. Which means that there is definitely some sort of translation going on. And it is through this process of translation that the anthropologist understands the culture of the native inhabitants about which he or she writes and also vice versa, the natives also understand the questions of the anthropologist for instance.

So if a culture is all sealed up and isolated then the very possibility of such a translation and communication has to be ruled out. But since such a translation is actually taking place in that field we cannot really regard that cultural landscape as completely isolated and sealed. So as Malinowski's case suggests, no culture is isolated enough to maintain any sort of purity or uncontaminated essence that remains static over time.

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Hybridity:

Bhabha views culture not in its unchangeable essence, but characterised by change, flux and transformation and most importantly by mixedness or interconnectedness, which Bhabha terms "hybridity"

The alternative to this idea of a static culture that Bhabha suggests is that of culture as an ever unfolding process rather than being characterised by an unchangeable essence, it is characterised by change, it is characterised by flux, and it is characterised by transformation. And most importantly it is underlined by a sense of mixedness or interconnectedness which Bhabha terms hybridity.

So how does this notion of cultural hybridity impact our understanding of the postcolonial condition? Let us consider the British colonial subjugation of India for instance. Now as Bhabha suggests cultures are dynamic processes characterised by change, flux, and hybridity, then the binary of a superior culture of the British coloniser and an inferior culture of the subjugated Indians immediately break down. To talk about superior Britishness or inferior Indianess would mean talking about static unchangeable cultural essences. But as we have seen in our discussion of cultural hybridity, culture is not about such fixed essences but it is about ever changing and ever transforming processes. However, the colonial discourse cannot admit this because the notion of a superior and exalted Britishness is at the core of its justification of colonialism as a civilising mission.

The moment it is pointed out that there is no inherent essence of British culture, the illusion of the civilising mission disappears and colonialism is revealed just as it is, which is an exploitation of other people's land and resources through brute force. The justification, cultural justification breaks down if we point out that there is no inherent notion of Britishness or Indianess. So, of course, there cannot be any inherent notion of a superior culture and an inferior culture.

Indeed it is interesting to note that much of what the coloniser projected as the superiority of their cultural identity, including the superiority that they ascribed to their white skin colour, emerged only gradually during the first decades of the 19th century. In fact during the 18th-century, for instance, the European colonisers had a much more fluid sense of cultural identity. And their approach to India was not marked by a belief in the binary of superior Britishness and inferior Indianess.

So, for instance, as Ashis Nandy points out in his book *The Intimate Enemy*, before the 1830's, roughly the 1830's, we can see most British Colonisers in India living life just like other Indian inhabitants and often marrying Indian wives and even offering pujas to Indian gods and goddesses. So, as you can see, the British colonisers did not bring with them any readymade idea of British superiority or exalted Britishness.

Such an illusion of a static cultural essence only developed later to provide a justification for the material exploitation that colonialism involved. Consequently the idea of a static

Indianness, which is inferior to the Britishness of the coloniser, was also a construction of this same colonial process. Now, here I would like to introduce you to another important concept in Bhabha, which is the concept of mimicry.

Now, according to Bhabha, the attempt to stabilise the cultural flux and hybridity that characterise the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised and to structure it in terms of a superior Britishness and an inferior Indianness led to a very interesting consequence. As, I have said, the construction of this idea of a superior Britishness or Western culture was crucial in defining colonialism as a civilising mission.

And the logic of this civilising mission was to culturally educate the subjugated natives so that they could attain the same level of civilisation as the colonisers. Right. So, to repeat civilising mission with justified colonialism was underlined by the logic that because the subjugated Indians are now exposed to the superior culture of the British colonisers they would ultimately learn from the British colonisers and would be elevated to that same level of civilizational superiority.

So, in other words, the civilising mission was about making the colonised more and more like the coloniser. And this project is most clearly stated in the 1835 Minutes that Macauley wrote, I have already referred to this Minutes in one of my earlier lectures, and here Macauley states in this minutes that the colonial government should spend more on English education in India so as to “create a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”

Now the problem with this effort to create a class of colonised people who are exactly like the coloniser is that if the project is ever to succeed then it will erase the assumed cultural gap between the superior coloniser and the inferior colonised, and thereby undermine the entire colonial process, entire colonial rule.

So if the colonised subjugated Indians were ever to become exactly like the British then there won’t be any notion of cultural gap, civilizational gap separating the coloniser and the colonised which in turn will destroy the logic that colonialism is required to civilise the people of India. Right. So, according to Bhabha, though the coloniser wants the colonised to mimic him, to imitate him, he never really expects the latter to catch up.

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Mimicry:

Bhabha points out that this very idea of a lesser culture mimicking the superior coloniser turns the act into a sort of mockery of the superior coloniser's culture. The mimic men of the colonial periphery are therefore, from the perspective of the coloniser, ever to remain people who are "not quite, not white"

So the mimic men of the colonial periphery are, therefore, from the perspective of the coloniser, people who forever remain "not quite, not white", and this is Bhabha's term - "not quite, not white". So they are almost like the British but never really like the British. Right. And that never really like the British, that caveat is important to maintain the assumed cultural gap between a superior coloniser and an inferior colonised.

Because if the gap completely closes down, then of course the justification of the civilising mission ends at that very point. But Bhabha points out that this very idea of a lesser human being, of course the coloniser considered us Indians to be lesser human beings, but this very idea of a lesser human being mimicking the superior coloniser also turns the act into a sort of mockery of the superior coloniser's culture.

And in order to understand this mockery, even imagine the situation when a gesture or a clown picks up the manners of a suave gentleman and then repeats it after him in an exaggerated and comic manner. Right. So it is imitation, it is mimicry, but it is not something that can be desired and accepted by the person who is being imitated because it is also a mockery of that person. Right.

So this possibility of comically undermining the coloniser and his superior civilizational position through a partial repetition, this is what Bhabha refers to as the menace of mimicry.

But now let us again return to the notion of cultural hybridity and see how it impacts the concept of nation-state.

Now I think it has already become clear to you that a notion of culture as changeable and dynamic process, characterised by hybridity of various elements, is fundamentally inimical to the idea of nationalism and to the socio-political construct of nation-state. Why? Because the idea of nation is ultimately defined by a cultural essence which is unique to the people who were resident within its political boundaries and which has remained unchanged for ages and will continue to remain so in the future. Right.

So what makes us Indians within this nationalist logic, is our Indianness which is a unchangeable cultural essence that we share with everyone living within the political boundary of India and that has remained unchanged, from the glorious days of the past, and has been forwarded to us, which we will forward unchanged to the future generations.

So this notion of Indianness as connecting us both with all the people living at the present and with the past generations and the future generations who are to live within this politically defined territory is at the heart of the idea of nation. Now, but therefore with nation we are back again to the problematic idea of static cultural essences. But, and because we have extensively dealt with the problem that underlines and undermines this notion of static cultural essences, I will not go into them.

But you see Bhabha's notion of culture therefore is untenable with the idea of nation-state. But more importantly, if we are to do without static cultural essences and think through the lens of cultural hybridity, then what kind of social organisation other than the nation-state can we conceive? Well the answer is perhaps best given by Salman Rushdie in his celebrated essay titled "Imaginary Homelands" where he urges us to look at ourselves not as grounded in any particular national culture but as displaced beings who are living the life of an exile.

The world around us is seeing an ever-growing number of humans being displaced, humans moving from one place to another because of various reasons, because of war, because of natural calamities, because of political persecution, because of economic aspirations and so on and so forth. And so the condition of being in exile is gradually becoming more and more common.

But, according to Rushdie, even if we are not physically displaced, all of us are displaced in time from the glorious national past that we might want to go back to. So, for Rushdie, every one of us, we are all exiles, we are all displaced, if not spatially then at least temporally. And in most cases, both physically and temporally. So such a mode of thinking, the problem is that, it robs us of our national identities that we have been taught to cherish since childhood.

But Rushdie argues that there is a rich compensation. And this compensation lies in the fact, that we then as exiles, and as displaced human beings, become an heir to all cultures of the world and we can fashion our own cultural identity by mixing the disparate elements that the world as a whole offer to us. Our cultural identity then becomes a dynamic process of transformation and gives us far more agency to shape ourselves than is offered by the straightjacket of national identity.

So with Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity we gradually move from nationalism and nation-states to the idea of cosmopolitanism. And we will discuss this in more details when we take up the poetry of Derek Walcott in our next lecture. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

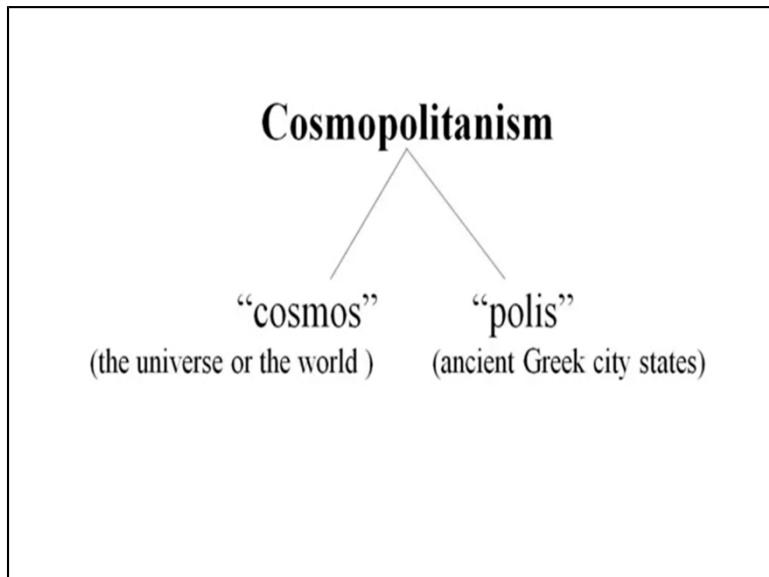
Lecture No. #15
Caribbean Poetry: Derek Walcott

Welcome again to this series of lectures on postcolonial literature. We had ended our previous discussion by saying that with intellectuals like Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie, we move from the confines of nationalism to the wider field of cosmopolitanism. And we will use this, as our starting point today for our discussion of Caribbean poetry and specifically for our discussion of the poet Derek Walcott.

But before we move on to Walcott and his poetry, we will look at Walcott and one of his poems, in fact, as representative of Caribbean poetry today. But before we do that, before we move on to Walcott, let me dwell upon the concept of cosmopolitanism for a while. Because in my previous lecture I have presented cosmopolitanism as a kind of an alternative to the sense of belonging in a nation, or to the sense of nationalism. And since we have discussed at some length the notions of Nationalism and the concept of nation state, it is all the more reason that we should discuss this alternative of cosmopolitanism.

Now, the word cosmopolitanism is difficult to describe in a brief and concise manner, and this difficulty primarily comes from the fact that this word or its variance have existed for more than 2000 years now. And, this 2000 year long history makes the understanding of this word particularly complex. But, having said that, I will try and simplify the matter as far as possible without making it too simplistic. But let us start, therefore by looking at the roots of the word cosmopolitanism. Now, the word cosmopolitanism has its root in the Greek language and it combines two specific Greek words.

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One is “cosmos” and the other is “polis”. Now, here again, these Greek words, which were relevant 2000, 2500 years ago, are difficult to translate in today's context. And it is difficult because most of us are not very well aware of the Greek context in which these words had their origin. But, roughly speaking, cosmos can be translated as the universe, or the world and the Greek word Polis signifies ancient Greek city States like Athens or Sparta.

Now, in order to understand cosmopolitanism, we have to understand how these two constituent parts, cosmos and polis, they combine and interact with each other. But again, before we do that, we need to focus on the component polis. Cosmos is easily understood. When we say that cosmos is basically the Universe, or the World, that is easy to grasp. But, what is difficult to grasp in this sort of combination of words is the constituent part, Polis.

Now, as I said, that polis can be roughly translated as a city State in ancient Greece. But this is not a very useful definition to us because in the contemporary world, we are used to the concept of nation-states, rather than city states. And therefore, it requires some kind of an explanation about what a polis was. Now, but the way I want to explain this is not by going into historical details about the Greek polis as it existed.

But rather, I would just like to point out that the nature of the ancient Greek polis can be understood, however imperfectly, by applying to it the parameters of nation-states and one's sense of belongingness to a nation with which all of us are familiar. So, just like we form part of a nation-state, by sharing certain rights and obligations as its citizens, ancient Greeks too,

just like this, belonged to one particular polis or another. And they belonged to these polis by sharing certain obligations and rights as citizens.

The second point that helps us understand this concept of polis through the lens of nation-state is that just like the strong sense of nationalism that today pervades most of the global population and defines their identity, the identity of an ancient Greek was also very strongly determined by his being part of one polis or another. So, for instance, in the 5th century BCE, and I am talking about 5th century BCE because we have already referred to this period in one of our earlier lectures.

So, in the 5th century BCE there was actually no concept of a Greek Nation, there was no Greece nation-state. Rather, people owed their political allegiance to a polis. And this allegiance, in fact, would define their identity to a large extent, just like today our affiliation to one particular nation-state or another defines, to a large extent, our identity, defines who we are. So for instance today, we know Plato as a very famous philosopher from Greece.

But, if Plato, during his time, would have been confronted with this identity, that you are from Greece, Plato would probably have been very bewildered, to say the least. Because, he was born in Athens, the polis of Athens. And therefore, his identity was primarily that of an Athenian. So, he was an Athenian rather than a Greek. Now, therefore, the strong sense of nationalism that often ties us today with one particular Nation State or another, we can find a similar sentiment connecting individuals in ancient Greece with one particular polis or another.

Now, I hope, we have arrived at some understanding of what polis, what the nature of polis was, and more importantly, what was an individual's connection with the polis, to which he belonged. But, now we come to the more important point, how the two elements cosmos and polis interact and combined with each other to form the concept of cosmopolitanism. Now, the first recorded cosmopolitan in history is perhaps the 4th century BCE intellectual, who is known as Diogenes the Cynic.

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And he was born in the polis of Sinope which is located in present-day Turkey. But at that point of time it was a Greek colony. Now, it is said that once when Diogenes was asked, where he came from.

Diogenes the Cynic

Born in Sinope (modern-day Sinop, Turkey) in 412 or 404 BC and died at Corinth in 323 BC



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Diogenes the Cynic's Definition of Cosmopolitanism

- He claimed he was not a citizen of any particular polis, but a “*kosmopolitēs*” ie “a citizen of the world or of the universe”
- This claim of being a citizen of the world is to be understood here as a negative claim rather than a positive one, because by saying that he is a citizen of the world Diogenes is saying that he is no citizen at all, and feels himself to be above and beyond the rights and obligations that bound individuals in ancient Greece with their poleis and binds individuals today with their nation-states
- Cynics advocate a lack of commitment to any particular state or geopolitical entity in general

He replied that he was not a citizen of any particular polis, but, he was a citizen of the world. And the Greek word that Diogenes apparently used was *kosmopolitēs*, which is the root word of cosmopolitan that we use today. Now, it is generally agreed that what Diogenes was indicating, by his answer, that he was a citizen of the world, was that he was no citizen at all. He did not belong to any polis.

So, in other words, the claim of being a citizen of the World, is to be understood here as a negative claim, rather than a positive one. Which means that by saying, that he is a citizen of the World, Diogenes is saying that he is no citizen. And he is, in fact, beyond and above all the rights and obligations that bound individuals in ancient Greece with their polis, and binds individuals today with their nation-state.

Now, this idea of renouncing the ties with all geopolitical entities, be it a Polis or a nation state, this kind of renunciation, as a kind of cosmopolitanism, has been shared by very few people in history. Yet, the critics of cosmopolitanism have levied their criticism primarily at this strand of cosmopolitanism, which advocates a lack of commitment to any particular State or geopolitical entity. And we are reminded here, of course, of the persecution of Jewish intellectuals in Soviet Russia by Stalin.

And these Jewish intellectuals were labelled as cosmopolitans, or as rootless cosmopolitans. And they were labelled as rootless cosmopolitans because the Soviet State under Stalin believed that they were not patriotic enough, they did not have enough commitment towards the Soviet State.

Now, as I said that this brand of cosmopolitanism, though it has often been criticised, adherents of the idea of cosmopolitanism seldom speak about this kind of cosmopolitanism. Rather they speak about a different kind of cosmopolitanism, which can be identified, for instance, among the Stoics.

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Stoicism

- Stoicism as a philosophy first emerged in Greece during the 3rd Century BCE
- Unlike Diogenes the Cynic, the Stoics believed that being a citizen of the world was not in itself contradictory to the idea of being a citizen of a particular state
- The stoics considered themselves to be citizens of the world because they believed that all human beings formed part of a universal community, and any individual has duties and obligations not just to his fellow citizens of a particular state but also to this greater human community
- The whole world was conceived by them as a huge polis or a state and all human beings were regarded as its citizens.

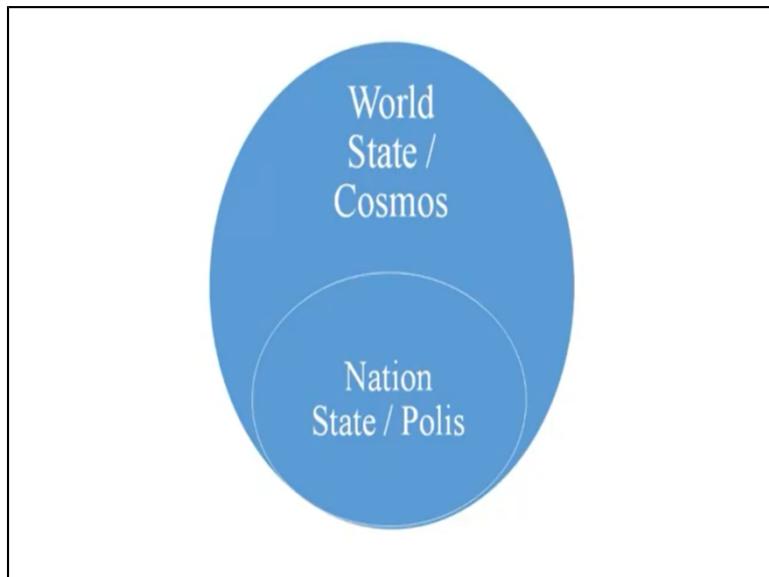
Now, Stoics are practitioners of a philosophy, or a worldview, which is referred to as Stoicism. And Stoicism, as a particular way of thinking about the world, first emerged in Greece during the 3rd century BCE. And since then it has passed through many phases and transformations. And, here again I will not bore you with a detailed history of the various phases and transformations of Stoicism as a branch of philosophy.

But, what is to be noted here is, unlike Diogenes the Cynic, the Stoics believed that being a citizen of the world was not in itself in opposition to being a citizen of a particular State. In other words, the notion that one is the citizen of the world, is not in conflict with the idea that one is also the citizen of a particular state. The Stoics, in fact, considered themselves to be citizens of the world. Because, they believe that all human beings formed part of a universal community.

And any individual had duties and obligations, not just to his fellow citizens of a particular state, but also to this greater human community. Now, the whole world therefore, was conceived by the Stoics as a huge polis, or as a state in itself. And all human beings were regarded, first and foremost, as citizens of this world state, or world polis, or cosmo polis.

And, but, if the entire world is a state, and therefore each of us have obligations to that world state and to all the human beings who are citizens of that world state, then the notion of commitment becomes somewhat diluted. Because, if we are to be duty-bound to everyone, then there is a risk that we end up being duty-bound to no one. But the Stoics had another argument.

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The Stoics said that, we can serve the citizens of our own nation state or polis as representatives of that world state. Because it is not possible for us to serve everyone, we serve a representative section of that human community. And that representative section can be the citizens of your own polis, or your own nation state. So, the state, or the nation, or polis, according to this Stoic worldview, fits into the concept of a world state, or a world polis, as smaller wheels fit into a larger wheel.

And, one's commitment, to these two overlapping spheres of the polis and the cosmos, of the state and the world, is complementary and not in opposition to each other. So, I mean, just to repeat myself so that you understand this very clearly. You can serve both your polis and the world state, simultaneously, according to the Stoics. There is no conflict in this dual sense of commitment. They fit as if they are concentric circles, one within the other.

Now, the most powerful proponent of this particular version of cosmopolitanism which conceives the world as a super state, as a huge polis, and which tries to couple one's allegiance and commitment to nation state and to the universal human community, is the 18th century German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant.

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Now, Kant, in his seminal essay, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, which was published in 1795, talks about a world state. And, not only does he talk about, the world as a single State, but he also talks about world laws or cosmopolitan laws, which will be applicable to everyone, to the entire humanity. Because all of them, all of us are citizens of that world state. But here we need to remember that Kant does not propose the end of individual sovereign states.

Immanuel Kant
(1724 – 1804)



Toward Perpetual Peace
(1795)

But rather, what he proposes is a delicate balance between the individual states, and the nations, and the notion of a world state. So again, we go back to this idea of concentric circles, where nation states fit within the large circle of a world state. And how this might work, we get a glimpse of this by studying, for instance, how institutions like the United Nations, function today. How laws or charters, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are implemented today.

How International Law Courts like the International Criminal Court in the Netherlands, how they function. And they are these institutions, these laws, these rights, which are internationally valid. They echo this idea of cosmopolitanism that we first find in the Stoics and then again in Kant. But when we talk about Cosmopolitanism as a State of being simultaneously committed at a local level to the polis, or the nation, or even to our own family, to our village, to our clan. So, these are our local commitments.

And we also speak of a simultaneous commitment, at a global level, to the entire humanity. In doing so, we are actually talking about various forms of sharing and overlapping. Let me simplify this for you. If, I am to be committed towards my own nation state, as also towards the universal sort of entire humanity, the universal notion of human beings as citizens of the world state, what is going to be my commitment, what is going to be the nature of my commitment.

Well, the nature of my commitment, can be various, and can be different. And can be different primarily because different commentators of cosmopolitanism, have understood this overlapping in different ways.

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3 Kinds of Commitment or Sharing

- Political Engagement
- Moral Sharing
- Cultural Sharing

So, for instance, it can be political, this overlapping, where we act out our duties as citizens of India, for instance, by abiding by the laws of this country, while also performing our duties to our fellow human beings, by forwarding the cause of universal human rights which is an International Law, right. So, here, we are simultaneously committed to the laws of our nation state and to the universal law of human rights. There is no conflict, right.

And this is our political engagement, with both the nation state, and with the world state. Apart from this political engagement, there can also be moral engagement at these two simultaneous levels. For instance, this can be a moral sharing, where we perform our moral duties towards our families, while at the same time we try to reach out to humanity at large through participating in institutions like, the Red Cross Society, and institutions like, for instance, Doctors without Frontiers.

But, it can also be cultural sharing, cultural commitment, where we share our sense of belongingness to multiple cultures. And it is this cultural cosmopolitanism, or multiple cultural belongingness that we will study today with reference to Derek Walcott and his poetry. First, let me introduce Walcott to you before we go on to discuss his poetry.

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Derek Walcott
(1930 -)



Walcott won the Nobel prize in literature in 1992. And he was born in the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia in 1930. And is renowned worldwide both as a poet and as a playwright. And he has been a prolific author, known both for his ability to produce epic poems like Omeros, for instance, but also for his ability to write shorter verses, very powerful shorter verses.

And as a dramatist he is perhaps the most well-known for his play, Dream on Monkey Mountain, which was first produced in 1970. Now, to understand the notion of cultural cosmopolitanism and how it operates in the writings of Walcott, we need to keep in mind the specific context from within which Walcott writes his poetry or his plays. And this specific context that I am talking about, is a context of Caribbean history.

Now, this context of Caribbean history situates Walcott at a unique crossroad of cultural identities, and to explore the sense of multiple cultural belongingness, or cultural cosmopolitanism that this context opens up for Walcott, we will be looking at a very well-known poem by him which is titled, ‘A Far Cry from Africa’. But first, a few words about this Caribbean context, and Caribbean history.

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Now, the islands that form the Caribbean, or the West Indies, were infamously described by the 19th century British Historian, James Anthony Froude, as an island uninhabited by “rational” human beings, and a space which did not contain any trace of civilisation. Now, part of this statement is of course informed by the colonial snobbery of a white man who is speaking about a subjugated land.

James Anthony Froude
(1818 – 1894)



And we have seen this snobbery at work when we discussed the African context, where to someone like Marlow, standing in his boat, the Africans do not even qualify as human beings. So, part of Froude's rejection of the Caribbean as a land uninhabited by rational human beings, of course comes from this white colonial snobbery.

But, part of it is also true, in the sense that, the native inhabitants of the Caribbean islands were driven to near extinction by the Spanish Colonisers during the 16th century. And this meant not only a wiping out of a whole community of people, but also a wiping out of entire cultural and knowledge systems, which the indigenous people of a Caribbean islands possessed.

And later, when the decline of the Spanish empire in this part of the World was followed by the coming in of the British, and the French Colonisers, and the Dutch colonisers, they brought to the Caribbean millions and millions of slaves and indentured labourers, from distant parts of the world, like Africa for instance, or India, and thereby changing the entire demographic profile of these islands.

The Caribbeans is therefore a space which do not retain much of the traces of its original inhabitants and their cultures, but which is nevertheless a huge melting pot of different people, from different parts of the world, different languages and different cultures. So, on the one hand, the original cultural template was scrubbed clean almost by the Spanish conquistadors.

But, on the other hand, Caribbean island as a location, where various different people, with various different cultures from different parts of the world came together, made Caribbean, a huge melting pot of peoples, of cultures and of languages. However, as I just mentioned, when Froude wrote about the Caribbean islands in the late 19th century, the civilisation and cultural attainments of the indigenous population had all but vanished and a new Caribbean culture was yet to emerge. Therefore, in the Caribbean, Froude could see only an empty space of civilizational nothingness. And the sense of nothingness that Froude associated with the Caribbean in the 19th century was again echoed in the 20th century by the Caribbean born author V S Naipaul, an author with Indian origins.

And he too believed that his home country was actually a space of nothingness. It did not produce anything, it did not have any history of its own. But when we come to Walcott, we see that this very nothingness becomes a position of cultural strength and cultural experimentation.

And Walcott uses the notion of his homeland as a blank slate to forge a new identity that brings together the traces of all the multiplicity of peoples, of languages, of cultures, that had come together in the Caribbean. Thus, unlike the nationalist writings that we had studied before, in the Indian context, where we saw the attempt to recover a pure Indian identity by carefully separating out what is foreign, and by trying to reach at the indigenous core.

In the writings of Derek Walcott, we come across something really different. We come across an attitude of eclecticism, an attitude of universal acceptance. And this eclecticism is beautifully brought out in the poem that we are now going to discuss, the poem, which is titled, “A Far Cry from Africa”. Now, “A Far Cry from Africa” was written in response to the news of the British atrocities against Kenyan freedom fighters during the Mau-Mau uprisings of the 1950’s.

And in the poem Walcott extends his solidarity to the dead Africans. And here we need to remember that some of Walcott's own ancestors came to the Caribbeans from Africa, bound in slave ships. But, even while extending his solidarity, Walcott cannot distance himself from the English language which he has inherited from the very British colonisers who enslaved his ancestors and who now persecuted the Mau-Mau revolutionaries in Africa.

So, he talks about his, “love” for the English tongue which,, though it originally belonged to the colonisers, is now being used by him to lament the death of the people suffering from the atrocities of colonialism. The language of the colonisers being used to lament the atrocities of colonialism. And, this is very important. This cultural appropriation is crucial in Walcott. Because it speaks of how we can take hold of the very weapons of colonial oppression.

And indeed, the forceful imposition of English language on the colonised subjects was an act of cultural oppression. But, what Walcott is showing that we can take hold of such weapons of colonial oppression and we can then use them to our own benefit. We can make these weapons, the tools of our self-expressions, in which case, they seized to be modes of oppression and they become the means of showing empathy, of showing kindness, of showing solidarity.

But this process, which Walcott performs very beautifully in the poem “A Far Cry from Africa”, is not an easy process. Appropriation is never easy. Because as a legacy bearer of both the coloniser and the colonised, Walcott feels his identity in conflict. And therefore, he writes in his poem, that he is, and I quote his words, divided to the vein, the veins that run within his body.

And probably, all of us who have passed through the colonial process, or whose ancestors have passed through the colonial process, and irrespective of the fact whether we belonged to the side of the colonisers, or to the side of the colonised, we are perhaps all divided to the vein, and our identity is invariably informed by this conflict. For Walcott, however, this conflict becomes the very essence of his hybrid identity, of his new Caribbean identity.

Because there is no way he can wash away the African blood that runs through his body and neither can he unremember the English tongue which is as much part of his identity as the African blood in his veins. We will discuss, this notion of Hybrid Identity, further, in our next lecture on Diaspora and diasporic Literature. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

Lecture No. #16

Diasporic Literature: Selections from Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies

Hello everyone and welcome back to another lecture on postcolonial literature. Today we will again pick up the notion of belonging simultaneously to multiple cultural traditions which we discussed in our previous lecture while talking about cosmopolitanism. And, in today's lecture, we will explore this idea of multiple cultural affiliations with reference to what is called diasporic literature.

And this category of diasporic literature has come to form an integral part of the broader category of postcolonial literature. And in order to understand this concept of diasporic literature, what this umbrella termed as diasporic literature signifies, I think we should start by defining for ourselves the term diasporic itself, that adjective. Now, diasporic is an adjective that is derived from the noun diaspora. And this noun diaspora has its roots in the Greek language.

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Historical significance of “diaspora”

- The word in its Greek form means dispersing or scattering of seeds during the process of sowing. However, today the primary understanding of 'diaspora' relates to the dispersion of people rather than seeds
- Chapter 28 verse 25 of *Book of Deuteronomy (Old Testament)* uses the Greek root word of diaspora to describe how, if the commands of the God are not obeyed, then the God will cause the disobedient people to be defeated by their enemy and cause them to be dispersed among all the kingdoms of the earth.
- This connection between exile and diaspora most strongly resonates in the history of the Jewish community, which was banished from its homeland in the sixth century BCE after the holy city of Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, the word in its Greek form means dispersion and scattering of seeds during the process of sowing. So, it primarily, in its original form related to the field of agriculture.

However, today the primary understanding of diaspora has changed. And today it relates to the dispersion of people rather than seeds.

And this specific association of the concept of Diaspora with the dispersion of people rather than with seeds can be traced back, for instance, to the Book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament of the Bible where in Chapter 28 verse number 25 we find the use of the Greek root word for diaspora. And there it is used to describe how if the commandments of the god is not followed then the god will cause the disobedient people to be defeated by their enemy.

And the god will cause them to be dispersed from their homeland and to be scattered among all the kingdoms of the earth. Now, while looking at this occurrence, early occurrence of this word diaspora in the Old Testament which is used to mean a dispersion of people, we need to keep in mind that here the idea of diaspora is closely associated with the notion of exile or of being removed from one's homeland as a form of punishment.

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And this connection between exile and diaspora most strongly resonates in the history of the Jewish community which was banished from its homeland in the 6th century BCE after the holy city of Jerusalem was sacked and the temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Now, this exile, this 6th century BCE exile and the memory of this exile still informs Jewish identity and is an integral part of the cultural memory of the Jewish Diaspora.

That is, the Jewish people who live in different parts of the world dispersed from their homeland. And this sense of exile within the Jewish community is closely entwined with a sense of nostalgia. A sense of nostalgia for the lost homeland and a desire to return to it.

Now, all these emotional and cultural associations that I have just described to you referring back to the Old Testament, to the Jewish history, all of these shape our present understanding of the term diaspora. And let me, before I proceed any further, let me reiterate the main points again with regards to diaspora so that we know that we have clearly understood the term diaspora and its various connotations.

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So, what is diaspora? Firstly, diaspora refers to communities of people living away from

What is Diaspora?

- Firstly, diaspora refers to communities of people living away from what they consider to be their homelands
- Secondly, this state of living away from the homeland bears the negative connotation of being in exile
- Finally, the feeling of being in exile evokes within the diasporic community a sense of nostalgic longing for a lost homeland and a desire to return

what they consider to be their homelands. Secondly, this state of living away from their homeland bears the negative connotation of being in exile. And thirdly and finally, the feeling of being in exile evokes within the diasporic community a sense of nostalgic longing for a lost homeland and a desire to somehow return to that homeland which has been lost.

Now, keeping in mind this general characterisation of diaspora and diasporic identity, let us now try and see how it relates to postcolonialism and postcolonial literature. Because ultimately that is our main concern in this course. Well, as discussed at the very beginning of this lecture series, colonialism connects the two distant spaces of the metropolis and the colonial periphery through a constant traffic of goods of capital but, most importantly, of people.

So, in other words, human dispersion and formation of diasporic communities are integral to the process of colonialism itself. Now, in our previous lectures we have already discussed a bit about the white man who is removed from his homeland in the metropolis and who comes to the colonial periphery to the colony of the metropolis. And here, I am thinking about our discussion of characters like Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, someone who comes to Congo, the colonial periphery from the metropolis Belgium.

And I am also thinking, for instance, of the Christian missionaries as depicted in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* who again, are people who have come to Nigeria, the colonial periphery from the mother country in Europe. But today in our lecture we are going

to discuss an opposite kind of migration, an opposite kind of dispersion that the colonialism gave birth to.

And this is the dispersion of the colonised subjects, not the representative of colonial power like Marlow or the Christian missionaries, but the dispersion of colonised subjects from their homelands and the migration of these people from the colonial periphery to the metropolis. However, before we deal with that, it is again important to remember that not every dispersion of colonial subjects from their homelands meant a gathering in the European mother country or in the Western metropolis.

Many people were simply displaced during colonialism from one area of the colonial periphery to another, from one colony to another. And here, for instance, we have already discussed this when we discussed Derek Walcott. But I am thinking, for instance, of the dispersion of slaves and indentured labourers during colonialism from places like India, for instance, and Africa.

And these dispersed labourers and slaves and sort of bonded labourers, they were gathering, they were being dispersed from colonies like India and Africa. But they were gathering not necessarily in the metropolis. But they were gathering in another part of the colonial periphery, like for instance, the Caribbean where these bonded labourers, these slave labour was necessary to run the sugar plantations, for instance.

Now, as I said, we have already discussed this particular kind of migration when we talked about Derek Walcott. And Walcott, if you remember, is the legacy bearer of the African diasporic community who gathered in the Caribbean during the days of slavery. After slavery was banned, during the early 19th century, indentured labourers took their places.

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And the Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh in his Ibis Trilogy, especially in the first novel in the Ibis Trilogy, Sea of Poppies, he describes in details how these indentured labourers were gathered from various parts of India, for instance, using different degrees of coercion and persuasion, and then they were shipped to distant Colonies, distant Colonial plantations to work as bonded labourers.

Amitav Ghosh (1956 -)

Ibis Trilogy :

- *Sea of Poppies* (2008)
- *River of Smoke* (2011)
- *Flood of Fire* (2015)



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V. S. Naipaul (1932 -)



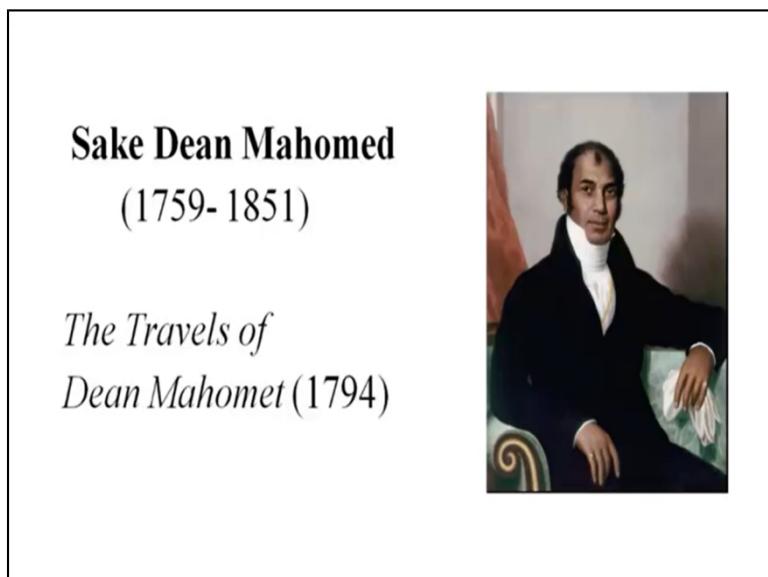
https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2001/

And to give you an example, the ancestors of the Nobel prize winning Caribbean author V S Naipaul, they migrated from India to Caribbean in this similar fashion to serve in the plantations there. And in fact, Naipaul in his writings give a very vivid glimpse into the ways of life of diasporic community of Indians that started taking shape in the Caribbean from the 19th century.

However, these dispersions of colonised subjects within the colonial periphery was also supplemented by significant waves of migration that reached from the colonies to the metropolis. And let us take for instance the relation between the metropolitan Britain and the colonised India. Indians started arriving in Britain from different parts of South Asia really as early as the 17th century.

And they were, these people who were arriving in Britain during the early days, were primarily servants employed by British households but they were also sailors diplomats and savants. One the most interesting Indian migrants to Britain during this early period was a man called Sake Dean Mohammad.

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And Dean Mohammad was born in Bihar in 1759. And he migrated to Britain in 1782, and there he introduced what he referred to as shampoo baths. And he also introduced Indian cuisine in Europe while becoming the first Indian author to publish a book in English. And this book, which was published in 1794 under the title *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, is simultaneously regarded as the first major work of Indian English writing, Indian English Literature, as well as the first major work of Indian Diasporic Literature in English.

Now the group of servants, sailors, and diplomats, were soon supplemented and then almost overshadowed by the population of Indian students who started arriving in Britain from India from around the 1840's. And this migration that started during the 1840's has not stopped yet. And it is interesting to note that many of our Indian nationalists like M K Gandhi, for instance, Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, B R Ambedkar, they all went to Britain for their higher studies.

So this connection between India and Britain and the migration of students from the colonised India to the colonial metropolis in Britain has played a really very significant role in the history, both of Britain and of India. Now, these various waves of migration from the

colonial periphery to the mother country established a number of diasporic communities within the metropolis.

And the category diasporic literature refers to the literature produced by these displaced people who migrated from the colonial periphery in the global South and who gathered in the metropolitan centres in the global North. And we need to note here that these metropolitan centres that we are talking about not only includes places like Britain or France or Spain but it also includes America today. Because America in many ways have inherited the mantle of the colonial West.

Now, as a literature that reflects the displaced condition of its author, diasporic writing is expectedly informed by the pangs and pains of exile. And it is also informed by a nostalgic desire to reunite with the homeland that has been lost during the migration.

And this sense of exile and nostalgia forms the keynote which unites the otherwise mind bogglingly wide variety of diasporic literature produced in Britain, France, Spain, America, by people coming from different parts of the world like India, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean islands. So in our lecture today we will try and understand this wide variety of literature that is categorised under the title of diasporic literature by focusing on one particular instance.

It is a story by the author Jhumpa Lahiri. And by focusing on that short story, it is a very poignant and very beautiful short story, we will come to that shortly. But in focusing on that short story our intention would be to identify the key concepts of exile and nostalgia for the homeland that informs the diasporic condition in general and diasporic literature in particular. But before we move on to the story let me introduce the author to you.

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Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1969 in London. And she was born to Bengali parents who had migrated from Calcutta. But Jhumpa Lahiri was not really brought up in England, she was raised primarily in the East coast of United States where her parents migrated when she was only two. More recently, Lahiri has shifted base again. And now she resides with her husband and two children in Rome, the Capital of Italy.

Jhumpa Lahiri
(1969 -)



And this diasporic identity of Lahiri, this history of migration and exile has created for her a unique location in the interstices or in the gaps of different cultures. And she identifies herself as writing from a position of marginality where limits of different cultures meet, or if they do not meet they leave a very interesting gap from within which one can look at these different cultures and combine various elements and write about them.

But nevertheless, we also need to understand that this marginality this interstices represents a gap, a sense of lack, a sense of loss. And we understand this sense of lack and sense of loss from Lahiri's own writings and interviews about herself where she says that, for instance, though she was born to a Bengali parents her knowledge of Bengali is only partial. And this sense of lack of her partial knowledge of her mother tongue has informed her cultural identity.

On the other hand, though Lahiri was brought up in America, her desire to keep alive her connection with her Bengali roots has meant that Lahiri could only partially assimilate herself within America. And Lahiri's move to Italy has only accentuated the sense of being a marginal entity who does not fully belong to any one particular culture, and who cannot firmly identify anyone place as her home.

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Now, this sense of being without a fixed cultural as well as spatial home strongly informs all of Jhumpa Lahiri's works, be it her novels like *The Namesake* or *The Lowland* or her celebrated collection of short stories like *Interpreter Of Maladies* or the more recent one

Notable works of Jhumpa Lahiri

- *The Namesake* (2003)
- *The Lowland* (2013)
- *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999)
- *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008)
- *In Altre Parole* (2015) / *In Other Words* (2016)

titled *Unaccustomed Earth*. But, whereas the state of being an exile informs Lahiri's writings with a sense of lack and loss, it also informs them with a tremendous sense of multicultural possibilities.

Again, as I said, the interstices, the margin, the gap between the culture, it is a gap therefore it signifies a lack, a loss, a sense of not belonging to any of the cultures. But again that gap, that interstices is also filled with multicultural possibilities. It is a position from which one can borrow, one can appropriate elements from different cultures, right. And this is what happens with Jhumpa Lahiri too.

Because by freeing oneself from the confines of one's homeland and one's native culture the condition of being an exile can make a person an heir to all cultures in the world. By not belonging to any one culture you actually become an heir to all cultures. And that opens a tremendous amount of possibilities of bringing together eclectic cultural elements to shape your own identity.

And such a stance, such a possibility is realised by Lahiri in her attempt for instance to learn Italian, the language of the country that she now resides in. And she is trying to make both that language, that culture and that country her own..

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Now, and in her latest book titled *In Altre Parole*, which is originally written in Italian but which has been translated in English under the title *In Other Words*, gives us an account of this difficult and rewarding attempt to appropriate for oneself a language and culture to

Notable works of Jhumpa Lahiri

- *The Namesake* (2003)
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which one is neither born nor exposed to while growing up. Jhumpa Lahiri's life and literature therefore shows the cultural possibilities that the condition of being born and brought up in a diaspora throws up.

But Lahiri is also keenly aware of the sense of alienation that this diasporic condition entails. And the migration from one's homeland can make one an heir to multiple cultures. Yes that is a possibility. But Lahiri realises that it can also as easily shut one out from all sense of cultural rootedness. And the claustrophobic sense of a cultural vacuum that a migration from the homeland can create for an individual is beautifully depicted by Lahiri in her short story that we are going to read today.

And that short story is titled Mrs Sen's. And it is there in the collected book of short stories which won the Pulitzer prize titled *Interpreter of Maladies*. And it is to this short story that we will now turn. This story Mrs Sen's is narrated by an American boy named Eliot. And it tells of the time that Eliot spent with his Bengali babysitter that, whom Eliot only knows as Mrs Sen. Who is Mrs Sen?

Well, Mrs Sen is a wife of Mr Sen who migrated from Calcutta to America to take up a job to teach mathematics in a university. And this is a very crucial part of her identity. Her identity, at least in America, refers back not to something that she is herself but refers back to her husband who has a job in an American university. So from the very beginning we do not even in fact know the name of this Mrs Sen that we are introduced to, the first thing of her.

So there is a sense of lack of identity that surrounds this entity of Mrs Sen making her slightly mysterious to us. Now, Mr Sen has a job in a university. He remains occupied. But the migration from Calcutta to America has meant for Mrs Sen a painful uprooting from her familiar Bengali social cultural milieu and most importantly from her family. To fill the sense of lack that the loss of her homeland creates for Mrs Sen she tries to cling to the memory of the tiniest details that gave substance to her life back in Calcutta.

And it is Calcutta which she still wistfully refers to as a home. In America Mrs Sen tries to recreate that lost home of Calcutta by repeatedly re-reading the letters that she occasionally receives from her people back home. She also listens to the familiar sounds of Indian classical music and offer relatives talking, by playing cassettes in a cassette player. And most importantly she's tries to recreate her lost homeland through her cooking, her cooking of Bengali dishes.

Now, this very attempt to live the memories of Calcutta in America and this attempt to transform an American space into a Bengali home creates for Mrs Sen a cocoon of isolation that is cut off from the immediate reality outside. And Mrs Sen's failure to come to terms with America and her conflict with the new physical reality of this foreign land is exposed in the story. So references to Mrs Sen's inability to drive on American roads.

And the tension between the Bengali in a reality that Mrs Sen creates within her apartment and the outside reality of the American roads reach a breaking point when one day Mrs Sen decides to drive herself with Eliot sitting next to her. And she decides to go to a fish shop to buy some fresh fish so that she can prepare her Bengali dish.

Now, this attempt by Mrs Sen to go and procure a quintessential item that is needed for a Bengali dish from the outside American space ends in a minor accident. And neither Eliot nor Mrs Sen is very grievously hurt. But nevertheless, Eliot's Mother stops sending him to Mrs Sen's. And the last thing that Eliot remembers of his Bengali babysitter is the sound of crying coming out of the bedroom of her apartment within which Mrs Sen had locked herself in.

In a way, Mrs Sen with her inability to break free from them cocoon of memory of a remembered homeland and her inability to connect with the outside space resulting ultimately in a psychological breakdown represents the opposite of what Jhumpa Lahiri is, the diasporic author who is confident in her ability to appropriate and make her own disparate elements from different cultures.

But the very fact that Lahiri creatively engages with characters like Mrs Sen shows her desire to recognise and address the difficulty that a migrant faces in connecting with the outside reality following her displacement and uprooting. The isolation of Mrs Sen's apartment and the sound of sobbing that comes out of her bedroom thus forms the dark underside of the diasporic condition which is otherwise marked by the luminosity of eclectic cultural possibilities.

With this exploration of Jhumpa Lahiri and her work we conclude our discussion of diasporic literature today. In our next meeting we will take up the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a very important theorist in the field of postcolonial studies. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #17
Gayatri Spivak : Answering the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Hello and welcome back to this course on postcolonial literature. Today we are going to take up the writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is one of the most influential critical voices, theorists, in the field of postcolonial studies. Now, I am sure that by now, after going through the previous lectures in this series in this course, you have realised that at the most fundamental level, postcolonial studies is an exercise in ethics.

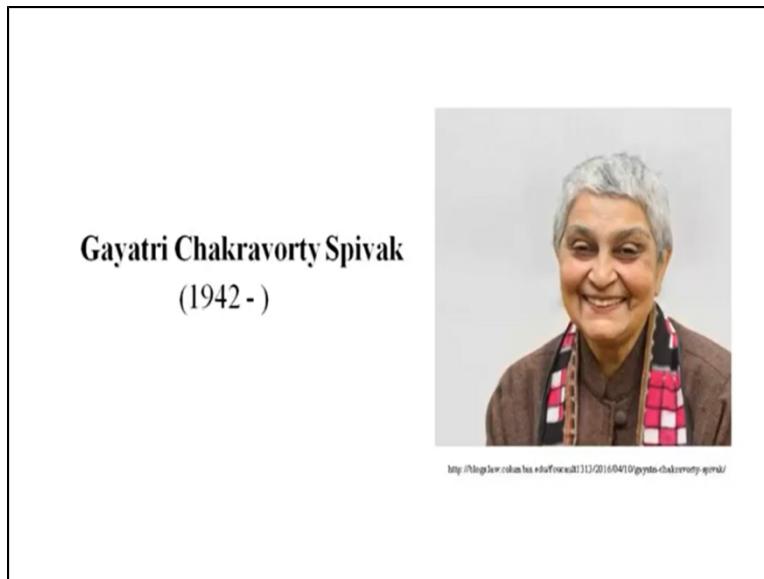
One of the main agendas of postcolonial criticism has been the dismantling of the Eurocentric worldview, which colonialism had naturalised and which had, in turn, marginalised numerous indigenous cultural and epistemic traditions across the colonised parts of the world. The other agenda of postcolonial studies has been to foreground the voice of the oppressed and to create conditions, at least within the academic institutions, so that the people subjugated by colonialism can be heard.

Both of these efforts, these ethical interventions, I would call them, are already prominently displayed in the works of Edward Said, the founding figure in the field of postcolonial studies. And, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak too, we find a continuation of this ethical imperative that underlines post-colonialism. Now, Spivak's ethical intervention is most associated with her work with the subaltern.

And, here I am talking about work. When I am talking about work, I am not only thinking about her academic writings, they are important. Yes, we are going to discuss them. But I am also thinking about her work as a teacher and activist among the landless illiterate population in the villages of West Bengal. So, Spivak's ethical intervention is characterised by her work with the subaltern, for the subaltern, both as an academic writer, theoretician and as an activist.

And indeed, at least within the academic circles, Spivak's name is today most widely associated with the highly influential essay titled "Can the Subaltern Speak." So, in this lecture, we will try and understand the contribution of Spivak in the field of postcolonial studies, by focusing on her elaboration of the term subaltern. But before we do that, let me introduce Spivak to you.

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in Calcutta in 1942 and it was a time when the British Raj, was fast losing its political grip over the Indian subcontinent. And these last years of the colonial rule was marked by calamitous violence. The Bengal famine of the early 1940's, which was triggered by the opening up of the Pacific Theatre during the Second World War, left literally thousands of skeletal human bodies dying in the streets of Calcutta.

And, if you remember, I had mentioned in one of my earlier lectures, that although we are primarily going to talk about colonialism and postcolonial legacies, resistance to colonialism, etcetera, in terms of cultural colonisation and cultural resistance, nevertheless, we should never lose sight of the physical violence that characterised colonial rule and colonial subjugation.

And so, as we see here, Spivak, who was to emerge as one of the foremost postcolonial theorist, grew up witnessing some of the most gruesome incidents of violence that were brought about by

the colonial rule and also, ironically, by the middleclass class nationalists, who in a place like India, touted the promise of ending British rule and its evil.

So, if we read Spivak's writing, we will see that when she is talking about this brute physical violence, to which she was exposed as a child, she is talking about a strange nexus between the British colonialist and the middle class nationalists. Indeed, for someone living in Calcutta during the 1940's, the violence of the artificially created Bengal famine was only surpassed by the violence that marked the birth of India and Pakistan as two distinct nation-states in 1947.

And, this birth of India and Pakistan was made possible by a pact that the middle class nationalists and the British colonialists had made together. And, it was basically a pact- what the pact actually meant was- a carving up of the communities living together in the subcontinent for ages, carving them up into citizens of two distinct nation-states. And, for young Spivak, growing up in Calcutta, this pact did not translate so much into the abstract idea of freedom, as to the more real spectacle of blood on the streets.

Now, just like Punjab, Bengal was also the site of partition and of gruesome violence and Calcutta was one of the cities which witnessed the most horrible scenes of crime and violence during the partition period. Thus, in her essay "Nationalism and Imagination," Spivak writes, that her earliest memories as a child are those of seeing blood on the streets and she emphasises on the statement. She says, that they were not metaphorical blood, they were real blood, coming out of killed colonised subjects.

And therefore, we need to remember, that the blood in this picture of colonialism and postcolonialism is not metaphorical, is not cultural, but real physical violence, was a real fact that informed colonialism. And the very fact that Spivak recalls these memories later on as a postcolonial intellectual to think through the idea of nationalism and the role of aesthetic imagination in conceiving nationalism, this shows how postcolonial high theory can grow out of one's engagement with the physical violence that has always underlined colonialism and its legacies. But, this raw physical violence apart, which colonialism and nationalism exposed to

Spivak, Spivak as a child was also exposed to some of the forces resisting this carnage, this violence.

And this force, for Spivak, was primarily the force of the Indian People Theatres' Association, for instance, which was an association of leftist artists who were trying to raise social awareness, during this period of time, through organising street theatres and through very popular songs that were introduced during these theatres. So, Spivak also remembers these theatres and these songs, produced by leftist artists.

And indeed, political leftism and engagement with the writings of intellectuals like Marx and Lenin, have remained prominent characteristics of Spivak's work. Apart from this leftist current, Spivak's intellectual horizon was also shaped by a thorough exposure to British literature, which she received as a student of the University of Calcutta. After graduating in 1959, Spivak moved to the West, where she completed her Master's degree at Cornell university in the United States of America.

And, this was followed by a year of fellowship at the University of Cambridge. For her PhD, she again returned to Cornell university, to work on the poetry of W B Yeats and she worked under the supervision of Paul De Mann. And De Mann is noted for, among other things, his efforts to import the insights of Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction into the field of literary studies. And, Spivak too, following the lead of De Mann, has remained strongly enthusiastic about deconstruction throughout her career as an academician.

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Indeed, Spivak first came to international limelight, as a critic, when in 1976 she published an English translation of Jacques Derrida's "Grammatology" under the title "Of Grammatology". And she published this translation along with an extensive commentary on the text, which formed the Translator's Preface.

Notable works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

- *Of Grammatology* (translation, with a critical introduction, of Jacques Derrida's text-1976)
- *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987)
- *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993)
- *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999)
- *Death of A Discipline* (2003)
- *Other Asias* (2008)
- *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012)

Since then, Spivak has gone on to publish a number of books including *In Other Worlds*, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, *Death of A Discipline*, *Other Asias*, and more recently, *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. However, as I've told you near the beginning of this lecture, Spivak's most influential and recognisable work has remained, "Can the Subaltern Speak." And, the first version of this essay, indeed this essay has a number of versions now, but the first version was published in 1985 in a journal called *Wedge*.

So, let us now turn to the notion of the subaltern and to the question that Spivak so famously asks in the title of her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak". Now, before we start exploring who or what is a subaltern, and before we start answering can the subaltern speak or not, it is essential to clarify at the very onset that though Spivak has occasionally been mistaken as the founder of the concept of the subaltern, this concept does not originate in her writings.

In fact in "Can the Subaltern Speak," we see Spivak engaging with versions of the concept of the subaltern which is already strongly established before she came out with her essay. But the very fact that today the word subaltern immediately conjures up the name of Spivak, tells us something about the impact that Spivak had on elaborating the notion of the subaltern. Now, let us again return to the word subaltern. And, as by now, I am sure you will know, my favourite habit is to first go to a dictionary and see what the dictionary tells us.

And, in this case, if you go to a dictionary, you will find that the original meaning of the term subaltern was a junior ranking military officer. And this particular use of the word subaltern, in fact, is still very much prevalent within the military even today. But in the field of critical theory, because we are concerned with critical theory here, the term can be traced back to the writings of the early 20th century Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci.

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Antonio Francesco Gramsci
(1891–1937)

Gramsci, who was a very prominent Marxist intellectual, Marxist theoretician, used the word subaltern to signify a section of people who were subordinate to the hegemonic groups or classes. Now, to understand this definition, we need to first comprehend the notion of hegemony as it operates in the writings of Gramsci.

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Now, in its simplest form, hegemony can be understood as a mode of exercising authority. Now, if you think about the concept of authority, you will notice that one of the most obvious ways in which authority can be asserted, and is asserted, is through the exercise of brute physical force. Now, for instance, if I have a gun, and I can terrorise you into submission, I can terrorise you into obeying my instructions, and fulfilling my self-interest, then that will be one way of asserting my authority over you. Right, that is very simply understood.

Hegemony

- Hegemony is a mode of exercising non-coercive authority
- According to Gramsci, within a society the ruling class mostly asserts its authority by this non-coercive method – that is by convincing the entire population that the interest of the ruling class is the interest of the entire population
- This non-coercive assertion of political authority by a particular class over other groups of people is referred to by Gramsci as hegemony

And, we can see, how this form of asserting and exerting authority operates within a society, if we think of the role that the police force, for instance, plays. However, Antonio Gramsci argues, that there is also another way in which one can exert one's authority over another. Thus, for instance, if I can somehow convince you that whatever I do, in my- sort of- to fulfil my self-interest, whatever I do in my good, also serves your good, it is also in your self-interest.

If I can convince you of that, then that is a more effective way of asserting my authority over you than using physical force. Because, if I can convince you that my self-interest is your self-interest, then you will do whatever is required to be done for my self-interest, I mean, without any sense of external force, you will do it willingly. Because, you have become convinced that whatever serves me, is also good for you.

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So, according to Gramsci, within a society, the ruling class mostly asserts itself, mostly asserts its authority, by this non-coercive method. That is, by convincing the entire population that the interest of the ruling class is the interest of the entire population. Now, this non-coercive assertion of political authority by a particular class over other groups of people is referred to by Gramsci as hegemony. So, as I said earlier, Hegemony in its simplest form, is actually a mode of asserting authority.

Now, to understand, how hegemony works, let us go back to the discussion about Indian nationalism that we have had in our previous lectures. If you remember, we had noted in those lectures, that most of the figures who lead the charge against the British belonged to a particular social class. And, I have referred to that social class, following Sumit Sarkar, as the middle-class. And, be it C R Das, for instance, or M K Gandhi, or Jawaharlal Nehru, or Subhash Chandra Bose, we have seen how all of these people, they share similar career trajectories.

But, when we think about them, we do not conceive them as middle-class heroes, but as national heroes. Heroes who spoke not on the behalf of a particular class, the middle-class, but on the behalf of the entire nation, right. And, Gramsci would argue that such ready acknowledgement of middle-class heroes as national heroes, is an example of the hegemony that the middle-class has exercised in postcolonial India over all other groups of people.

And how the middle-class has managed to convince all the other groups of people living within the subcontinent, that what is in the interest of the middle class is also the national interest. So, according to Gramsci, if Gramsci were to read the situation, it would be something like this, that postcolonial India has been characterised by the hegemony of the middle-class, where the middle-class has been able to convince the entire national population that whatever serves their interest, is also in the interest of the nation.

Which is why, for instance, we do not regard people like M K Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, C R Das, Subhash Chandra Bose as heroes or representatives of a particular class, but rather as national representatives.

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Now, this Gramscian understanding of the term subaltern was taken up by the influential group of South-Asian historians who formed the Subaltern Studies Collective in the 1980's. And this group of historians, whom we refer to as the Subaltern Studies Group, or Subaltern Studies Collective, they were primarily studying postcolonial societies, postcolonial India, postcolonial South-Asia.

Subaltern Studies Collective

- Is a group of influential South Asian historians who formed the collective in the 1980s
- Historian Ranajit Guha was one of the leading figures of this group
- His essay “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” gives us an account of how the group was using the word subaltern
- In his essay Guha presents the term “subaltern” in oppositional relation to the term “elite”.

And, one of the most significant figures within this group was the historian Ranajit Guha. And, Ranajit Guha, in his essay titled, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," gives us an account of how the group, Subaltern Studies Collective, was using the word subaltern. In his essay, Guha writes, that the term subaltern is oppositionally related to the term elite.

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- For Guha, the elite was constituted not only of the European colonisers but also of the dominant indigenous groups who had access to hegemony either through their association with the colonial government or through their western-style education or, in case of big landowners or industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie, through their wealth.
- Thus, in a more general context, the term elite represents all the sections of a society which have political and economic agency
- In other words, the elites are the people who can intervene and articulate their self-interests within the field of politics and economics

And, for Guha, who in his essay, in this particular essay that I have just mentioned, was working for within the context of colonial India, the term elite was constituted not only of the European colonisers, but it also included dominant indigenous groups who had access to hegemony, either through their association with the colonial government, or through their western-style education, or in case of big landowners, for instance, or industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie, through their wealth.

Thus, in a more general context, the term elite, represents all the sections of a society, which have political and economic agency, right, power to act out their self-interests and desires within the political and economic arenas. That is what an elite is. So, in other words, the elites are the people who can intervene and articulate their self-interests within the field of politics and economics.

And, Guha defines the subaltern, because he said that subaltern is oppositionally related to the elite. Subaltern is the opposite of the elite. So, Guha defines subaltern as all those people within a society, who do not fall under the category of elite. So here, subaltern is not really defined as a special class, or caste, or race, but rather subaltern represents a negative space or a negative position.

It is a position of disempowerment, opposition without social or political agency, opposition without identity. Now, Spivak and "Can the Subaltern Speak," that essay, as I said, engages with these existing definitions of the subaltern. So she engages both, with Antonio Gramsci, as well as with the essay of Ranajit Guha that I have just mentioned.

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"Can the Subaltern Speak?"

- The essay was published in 1985 in a journal called *Wedge*
- For Spivak, the characterising feature of this subaltern position is that no speech is possible from here
- This is however not to say that the physical act of speaking is impossible from within the subaltern position, but it is to say that this speech never gets accepted as meaningful utterances which carries the weight of socio-political agency and which can articulate self-interest and self-identity
- It has been argued by some scholars that rather than saying the subaltern cannot speak, it is more apt to say that the subaltern cannot be heard by the society

But, for Spivak, and this is Spivak's intervention, she characterises subaltern, or she identifies the characterising feature of this subaltern position as that of being unable to speak. Again, to repeat, for Spivak, the characterising feature of this subaltern position is that no speech is possible from here. So, in other words, the answer to the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak,' according to Spivak, is an unequivocal no. The subaltern cannot speak.

Now, the terseness of this assertion has often led to confusion about Spivak's intent. And she has also been criticised for an attempt to silence the subaltern but Spivak's argument is really simple to grasp if we understand speaking as generating discourse. Now, if you recall our discussion of Michel Foucault and discourse, in one of our early lectures, you will know that we had defined discourse as meaningful utterances.

And, we had also discussed, how within each society, there are checks and filters which allow certain utterances to be accepted as discourse and certain others to be rejected. So, theoretically, though anyone can speak or write infinitely, on any given topic under the sun, what will be

accepted as discourse, and what will not, is ultimately determined by the power equations that underline the society. And this is a known fact. So, I am not going into further details about this.

But, let me give you an example. For instance, in a society, where the dominant power structure equates reproductive heterosexuality with normalcy, it is very difficult, if not all-together impossible, to generate discourse regarding the rights of homosexuals. So, the position of the homosexual in a society underlined by reproductive heteronormativity, and reproductive heteronormativity is a term, that Spivak uses.

It basically means regarding reproductive heterosexuality as the only normal mode of sexuality-in such a society, homosexuals take up the position of the subaltern because discourse generation about homosexuality, by the homosexuals, become impossible in that society, which regards heterosexuality as the norm. And, it is a position of disempowerment, opposition without any access to agency that will enable one to define one's own identity, and it becomes impossible to generate discourse from within this subaltern position.

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Now, this is however not to say that the physical act of speaking is impossible from within the subaltern position. But, it is to say that this speech never gets accepted as meaningful utterances, which carries the weight of socio-political agency, and which can articulate self-interest and self-identity. So, it has been argued by some scholars, that rather than saying that the Subaltern cannot speak, it is more apt to say that the subaltern cannot be heard by the society, just like the mad person cannot be heard by the society because her speech is considered as vacuous.

Now, such rephrasing of Spivak's insight, is perfectly alright, provided, we understand that both the statements, "subaltern cannot speak," and "subaltern cannot be heard," refers to the same inability to generate discourse from within the subaltern position. This is a complex issue. And, it will become more clear in the next couple of lectures, where we will again take up this concept of subaltern, and we will take up the writings of Spivak.

But, we will apply them to a short story by Mahasweta Devi. And, if we read the notion of subaltern with the help of this story by Mahasweta Devi, which Gayatri Spivak herself has translated, I think this complex issue about the subaltern position, as well as the possibility/impossibility of subaltern speech, will become clearer. We will continue this discussion in our next lecture. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #18
Mahasweta Devi's Pterodactyl (I)

Welcome back again to the series of lectures on Postcolonial Studies. During the course of this lecture, as well as the next lecture, we will try to understand Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theorisation of the subaltern position through Mahasweta Devi's short story titled "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha". But before we start exploring the story itself, I would like to revisit Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak", an essay that we have been referring to from our previous lecture and I would like to revisit it to highlight the connecting threads that link Spivak's theoretical position, as far as subaltern is concerned and the story of Devi that we are going to study. Now, as you will remember, from our previous discussion, we had defined subaltern as a position of disempowerment and marginalisation.

And, we had also talked about Spivak's argument, that for someone within the position of subalternity, it is impossible to generate discourse about one's own desires, about one's own interests and indeed about one's own self-identity. And, according to Spivak, this is the characterising feature of the subaltern position. And, this basic argument is found coded in the form of the cryptic but very powerful statement that 'the subaltern cannot speak.'

And, I will not elaborate on this cryptic statement in this lecture because we have already discussed this, quite a bit, in our previous lecture. But what I would like you to note here is that, Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," is not merely limited to showing that the subaltern cannot speak. That is one of the things that Spivak does in her essay but that is not the only thing.

Indeed, this observation that the Subaltern is unable to generate discourse about herself or her own interests, her desires, this theorisation acts in Spivak as a trigger for ethical intervention. In other words, the realisation of the fact that the subaltern is disempowered and cannot speak for herself, her own desires, they act for Spivak, in her essay, as a kind of a trigger for ethical intervention.

So, in other words, this observation that the Subaltern cannot speak leads Spivak to another very critical and very crucial question. And what is that question? The question is if the subaltern cannot speak then what should be our critical response to it, our ethical response to it, our response to it as intellectuals, as academicians, as responsible members of a society. And here when I say our response, I mean the response of those who have agency and whose speech is recognised within the society as meaningful discourse.

Now, a simplistic answer to this particular question would be to state that since the subaltern cannot speak for herself, we, who are the elites, and here I use the term elite following Ranajit Guha's categorisation of a society into elites and subalterns. So, I mean clearly, if we have agency and if our discourse within the society is regarded to be valid discourse, then we are clearly not subalterns. And therefore we belong to the group of elites according to Ranajit Guha's categorisation, at least.

So, a simplistic answer to the question- that ethical question that I had raised just now is that since the subaltern cannot speak, we, who are the elites, should speak for the subaltern. Now, on the surface, speaking for or representing the oppressed and the disempowered sounds like a very valid ethical gesture but as Spivak points out in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," this desire to speak for someone else is fraught with its own dangers.

Because, what might happen, and indeed what often does happen, is that when the elite tries to represent the subaltern, he ends up not actually representing the subaltern but he ends up speaking for his own self. In other words, what gets represented as the voice of the subaltern is not her voice at all but the voice of an elite trying to pass off his own desires, his own interests, as the interest and desires of the subaltern.

And, according to Spivak, any such attempt to speak for the subaltern leaves the subaltern ultimately in that zone of speechlessness and in that zone which is bereft of agency. Now, this argument of Spivak that we cannot speak for the subaltern, we cannot really represent the subaltern as elites, is slightly confusing. But, I hope it will become clear if we dwell into the section of the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" where Spivak writes about the position of Sati.

So, to exemplify the dangers of the attempt of the elite to represent the subaltern, Spivak refers to the debate surrounding the ritual Sati in which an upper caste Hindu widow mounts the funeral pyre of her husband and ends her own life. Now, I think the context will make it very clear as to when I am referring to Sati as a ritual and when I am referring to Sati as the figure of the Hindu widow.

But, we should bear in mind that Sati refers to both. In contemporary discourse, it refers both to the ritual of self-immolation by the widow and also it refers to the figure of the widow herself. Now, Spivak in her essay argues that though a lot of discourse is available on Sati, the figure of the Sati herself, the figure of the Hindu widow who burns herself in the funeral pyre of her husband, represents a typical example of a subaltern who cannot speak.

And, this is because the different elite groups discoursing on Sati, though they claim to represent or speak for the woman who emulates herself with her dead husband, ultimately they end up speaking for their own self-interest. As I was just saying a few minutes before, that it is difficult to speak for the subaltern because when we try to speak for the subaltern as elites, we often end up speaking about our own self-interest, and about our own self goals, about our desires and we tend to impose those desires on to the Subaltern.

We tend to present them as the genuine desire of the subaltern herself. And, according to Spivak, this is what has happened with regards to Sati because a huge amount of discourse is available on Sati. And, all this discourse claims to be the voice of the Sati herself, the widow who burns herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. But Spivak's argument is that in spite of this claim, none of the elite discourses about the Sati actually brings out the voice of the widow.

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Now, to understand this better, let us start our enquiry from the year 1829 because this was the year when the then-Governor General of British India, Lord William Bentinck, he passed a legal Act. And what was the Act about? Well, the Act Sati, in the Indian territory, under British jurisdiction. And, of course later, this Act was also extended and implemented to the princely states.

Sati as the 'subaltern'

- In 1829, the then Governor General of British India, Lord William Bentinck, passed a legal act banning the practice of sati in the Indian territories under British jurisdiction
- This act formed the part of 19th century colonial discourse which characterised sati as a brutal and barbaric custom, and was nothing less than murder sanctioned by the Hindu patriarchy
- The law thus becomes an attempt by the British coloniser to speak on behalf of the subaltern Hindu widow who otherwise cannot express her desire or assert her authority against the aggression of the Hindu male
- According to Spivak, the colonial discourse made it out to be a case of "white men saving brown women from brown men"

Now, this Act or the legislative document which formed this Act can be read as part of the 19th century colonial discourse which characterised the right of Sati as a brutal and barbaric custom in which the "Hindu men" punished the Hindu widow by forcing her to mount the funeral pyre of her husband. In this colonial discourse, the right of Sati was nothing less than the murder sanctioned by the Hindu patriarchy.

So the colonisers, who banned the right of Sati, this sort of ritual of Sati, they regarded Sati as nothing less than a murder, a murder that was sanctioned by the Hindu patriarchal society. And the Hindu widow who mounts the fire is presented in this colonial discourse as the helpless victim of Hindu males' sadistic desire to punish and torture the weaker sex.

The law passed by the colonial government banning this ritual of widow sacrifice, therefore, becomes an attempt by the British coloniser to speak on behalf of the subaltern Hindu widow who otherwise cannot express her desire, or assert her authority, against the aggression of the Hindu male. Now, according to Spivak, the colonial discourse made this entire ritual of Sati, they made it out to be a case of "white man saving brown women from brown men."

And here, I mean, this is again a cryptic statement, typical of Spivak, "white man saving brown women from brown men." Of course, it refers to the apparent attempt by the white coloniser to save the brown women, which means the woman who were punished, and forced by Hindu males to burn themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands, from brown men, which means the Hindu men who sanctioned Sati.

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- Spivak argues that though the colonial discourse tried to argue that the banning of sati was an attempt by the colonial government to provide agency to the otherwise powerless Hindu widow, the ulterior motive behind this legislative act was different
- By portraying the rite of sati as a barbaric practice, the colonisers could justify the colonial rule as a civilizing mission. The very fact that brown women needed protection from brown men cast the white coloniser into the role of a benevolent protector whose civilizing efforts were needed to root out the cruel and savage practices that plagued the Hindu society in particular and the Indian society at large
- Contrary to the colonial view, the Hindu nativists like Rabindranath Tagore and Ananda Coomaraswamy, constructed the image of the Hindu sati not as a victim of male sadism but rather as someone who mounts the pyre of her husband out of her own desire

However, Spivak argues that though the colonial discourse tried to argue that the banning of Sati was an attempt by the colonial government to provide agency to the otherwise powerless Hindu widow, the ulterior motive behind this legislative act was different. What was the ulterior motive? Well, according to Spivak, by portraying the right of Sati as a barbaric practice, the colonisers could justify the colonial rule as a civilising mission because the very fact that brown women needed protection from brown men, cast the white coloniser into the role of a benevolent protector whose civilising efforts were needed to root out the cruel and savage practices that plagued the Hindu society in particular, and Indian society at large.

So, the argument here is that though the coloniser, by banning Sati, claimed to give agency to the Hindu woman, this was not the ulterior motive behind the banning of Sati. The ulterior motive was to portray the ritual of Sati as a barbaric practice, as a practice which needs to be condemned, which does not have a place within the modern society. The coloniser then presented colonialism as a civilising mission, which was needed in such a society to root out the barbaric practice Sati or similar barbaric practices like Sati.

So, the colonial discourse, though it claimed to be the voice of the Sati, is revealed by Spivak to be simply the voice of the coloniser which is informed not by the desires and interests of the Hindu widow but by the desires and interests of the British overlord justifying colonialism, justifying the colonial subjugation of India as a civilising mission. So, because there is Sati, you need to be under colonial rule because the argument is that you are not civilised yourself, because you burn your women.

So, your woman needs protection from you. You are not civilised enough, you are not mature enough, to take care of your woman which is why you need the British overlord, the protection of the British overlord, the civilising influence of the British overlord. Now, if you read Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," you will note that Spivak also makes a similar argument about the male Hindu nativists who opposed the colonial intervention in banning the ritual of Sati and who, too, claimed to speak on the behalf of the Hindu widow.

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So, contrary to the colonial view, these Hindu nativists, and they included people like Rabindranath Tagore for instance, or Ananda Coomaraswamy for instance, they constructed the image of the Hindu Sati not as a victim of male sadism but rather as someone who mounts the pyre of her husband out of her own volition, out of her own desire.

Now, Spivak argues that in spite of being a contrary discourse, this discourse is of course contrary to the colonial discourse which presents Sati as a kind of sadistic practice in which Hindu widows were bullied to burn themselves by the Hindu male- this is a counterpoint. But, according to Spivak, in spite of being a contrary discourse, in spite of being a counter-discourse, this Hindu nativists argument too, just like the colonial discourse, does not help us listen to the voice of the widow. Spivak points out a number of ways in which the widows voice gets suppressed within this Hindu nativists discourse. But we lack the time to go into further details, now. What we need to remember here, however is that, is the larger point that Spivak is making.

And the larger point is that any attempt to speak for the voiceless subaltern often ends up in creation of discourses which are underlined by the desires and interests of the elites, rather than the subaltern. Just like, the colonial and the nativist discourse about Sati, ends up reflecting the desires and interests of the colonisers and the Hindu males, and not that of the widow.

But, now we come to the question then, that what is the way forward- if we cannot really speak for the subaltern, if we cannot really represent the subaltern, because speaking for the subaltern often ends up in creation of discourses where we speak actually for ourselves and not for the subaltern. If that is the case, then what is the way forward? What should we, as

ethical individuals, do to address the situation of the disempowered and the voiceless subaltern?

According to Spivak, since we cannot really speak for the subaltern, the more ethical move would be to create enabling conditions for the subaltern to speak for herself, and thereby come out of the disempowered position of subalternity. And, let me repeat this. According to Spivak, since we cannot really speak for the subaltern, since we cannot really represent the subaltern, our ethical move should be to create enabling conditions for the subaltern, so that she can herself be empowered to speak and, by doing that, she can come out of the disempowered position of subalternity.

And, it is really in this light, in the light of creating enabling circumstances for the subaltern, that we should read Spivak's work as a teacher among the landless illiterate population in the villages of West Bengal. Spivak's role there, as a teacher, as she conceives it, is primarily the role of a facilitator, someone who creates the situation in which the subaltern can then find her voice.

But, for Spivak, even this act of creating enabling circumstances, for the subaltern to speak, comes later. According to Spivak, this step should be preceded by another step. And the first step should be to try and learn from the subaltern, and sensitise ourselves to her needs and her desires. The process of learning from the subaltern that will enable us to create the enabling circumstances, for her to come out and speak for herself, is a difficult process because, if you remember, we are starting from a position where the subaltern cannot speak.

So, trying to learn from someone who cannot speak is a difficult task. And, here again, we come across one of Spivak's cryptic but powerful statements, that we should "learn to learn from the subaltern." Now, the meaning of this phrase, "learn to learn from the subaltern," is that the desire to learn from the subaltern does not mean that we can automatically and easily start learning from the subaltern.

We need to learn how to learn from the subaltern because it is, as I said, it is not an easy task to learn from the individuals who have been denied, for very long, the right to speak for themselves. So, the first step is not even learning from the subaltern. The first step is to think

through the difficulties that are there, if you want to learn from the subaltern. So, the first step is really to know how to learn to learn from the subaltern.

Now, it is only when you face the subaltern as a learner, as a listener, that we can, perhaps, empower and enjoin the subaltern to speak. And, according to Spivak, this is our only ethical move that is possible.

Now, to explore Spivak's theorisation of the subaltern through a literary texts, let me now turn to Mahasweta Devi's short story. The story that we are going to read is one of the three tales by Mahasweta Devi that is contained in the book titled *Imaginary Maps*. And, this book contains three translated stories and all of these three stories are translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, herself. And, the story which we will be focusing on today, and in the next lecture, bears the title "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha." But, before we go on to the story, let me introduce Mahasweta Devi to you.

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Mahasweta Devi, a well respected author and social activist, was born in 1926 in Dhaka,



which is now the capital of our neighbouring state Bangladesh. After the partition of the subcontinent, during the independence, Devi moved from Dhaka to West Bengal, where she completed her tertiary education in English, first in Tagore's Viswa Bharati University, and then in the University of Calcutta.

She started her career as a teacher in a college in Kolkata but then navigated towards journalism and creative writing. Her career was also marked by social activism and a strong

commitment towards the tribal population of India. As Devi has, in fact, pointed out in several occasions, this tribal population, which forms about 1/6th of the total population of India, has long suffered unimaginable oppressions from the people who belong to the mainstream.

With every wave of migration that has arrived in the subcontinent, the position of the indigenous tribal population has been made more and more precarious. The forest, which is their habitation, has been gradually taken away from them and their ways of life have been brutally crushed. Devi traces back this oppression of the tribal population, back to the days of Hindu epic Ramayana, and argues that the oppression that started so long back, has not ended yet.

Under the British rule, many of the tribals were branded as criminals and their rights to the forest were curtailed. And such curtailment of tribal rights has continued even in post-independence India. Thus, here we are confronted with a form of oppression that is as gruesome as the colonial oppression that we have discussed in this course. And the tribal in the story of oppression, the tribal emerges as a architable subaltern, whose voice has been systematically gagged and marginalised for centuries.

Both, as a social activist and as an author, Devi has stood up for the rights of the disempowered tribals and her work, both as an author, and as a social activist, has been widely acknowledged, both in India and abroad. And she has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, Padma Shri, and Padma Vibhushan.

Now, one of the reasons I chose the story "Pterodactyl" for our reading in this course is because Devi herself, in an interview with Spivak, identifies it as the summation of the entire experience she obtained while working with the tribals. She also identifies the story as the distillation of the agony of the tribals that she had learn to perceive through her sustained engagement with them.

- "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha" (*Imaginary Maps*, 1995)
- Written by Mahasweta Devi and translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
- "If read carefully, *Pterodactyl* will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalized people all over the world. [...] *Pterodactyl* wants to show what has been done to the entire tribal world of India. [...] Each tribe is like a continent. But we never tried to know. Never tried to respect them. That is true of every tribal. And we destroy them." - Mahasweta Devi in an interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

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In Devi's own words, and I quote, "If read carefully, *Pterodactyl*, the story, will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalised people all over the world. *Pterodactyl* wants to show what has been done to the entire tribal world of India." Devi then goes on to add that, and I quote again, "Each tribe is like a continent. But we never tried to know them. Never tried to respect them. That is true of every tribal. And we destroy them."

So, "Pterodactyl," really is a story which confronts this narrative of destruction which is continuing even today in modern day India in the name of development. It speaks of our ethical obligation to stop this wanton destruction and to reach out to the tribals, not in the role of subjugators, or even in the role of patronising superiors, but as empathetic listeners and learners. To quote Devi again, "Our double task is to resist development actively and to learn to love."

We will elaborate on this double task in our next lecture. But I would like to end today's discussion by briefly commenting on how "Pterodactyl," the story, and Devi's engagement with the tribals that it narrates, how do they connect to the concerns of postcolonial studies. Well, this story contributes to our understanding of the postcolonial situation in at least two distinct ways.

Firstly, by speaking about the subalternization of the tribals in India, that has continued from the period of the British raj to the present day, it points out the fact that even as an independent nation, we are still burdened with a huge amount of colonial baggage and we

have not really been able to dismantle the colonial structures of coercion, subjugation and oppression.

Secondly, this narrative about the tribals whose world we have destroyed and whose world we continue destroying even today, questions the narrative of nationalism, it questions the narrative of postcolonial freedom. Because, it forces us to reconsider the kind of freedom that we have earned. Because, this freedom that we talk about so much, that we celebrate every independence day, and the sense of agency that this freedom has given us, has definitely not reached the hundred million strong tribal population in India.

"Pterodactyl" asks us the question that what kind of nation have we really built for ourselves. What is this nation in which the tribals, who are, as the Indian word Adivasi suggests, the original or the primitive inhabitants of this land, they do not have a place? What is this nation that we have created for ourselves? It is definitely not a very inclusive nation if it leaves out the hundred million tribal population.

We will take up this powerful story of Mahasweta Devi, as well as the difficult question it raises for us, in our next lecture. Thank you for listening.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #19
Mahasweta Devi's Pterodactyl (II)

Hello and welcome back. This is our penultimate lecture in the series of lectures that we have been doing on postcolonial literature. And as you will know, in our previous two lectures, we had dwelt upon the theoretical lens of the speechless subaltern through the writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and we have done so to approach Mahasweta Devi's story "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha".

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"Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha"
(*Imaginary Maps*, 1995)

In this lecture, we will take up the story proper and see how what we have discussed so far about the subaltern position plays out in Devi's narrative. Now, the story that we have already started discussing in our previous lecture, deals with a journey. It is a story about a journey. A journey undertaken by a character named Puran Sahay. And, Puran Sahay is a journalist who travels to the heart of a tribal area in Madhya Pradesh called Pirtha.

Puran arrives in this region to investigate a strange sighting that has taken place there and an "unearthly terror" that has descended upon the tribal population there because of the sighting. Puran has also learned about an epidemic that is apparently going on in Pirtha and he has also heard about people dying of starvation there.

However, near the beginning of the story, there is not much clarity about any of these issues including the sighting and the unearthly terror that it has apparently unleashed on the local population. Now, in a kind of a frame narrative which perceives the actual journey to Pirtha, we are told about the history of this character Puran Sahay. We come to know that his father has been a member of the communist party and that he was something of an idealist.

We also learn that some of this idealism of his father has rubbed on to Puran and Puran, in his turn, has chosen the career of an investigative journalist and his effort, in fact, to bring to the light the persecution of lower castes and tribals in the newspaper have earned him a lot of praise.

Thus, in Puran, we can recognise a representative figure of the mainstream people who, just like Mahasweta Devi herself or even like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is guided by a sense of ethical imperative to reach out to the disempowered subaltern and to try to help them. Here, however, the story also points out the rarity of such sense of ethical obligation within the mainstream.

So indeed, Puran and his ethical obligation towards the disempowered sections of the society is presented as somewhat of an anomaly within the mainstream society. The news publication group *Patna Dibasjyoti*, for whom Puran works, also brings out a tabloid magazine with Bollywood news and we are told that it is this magazine, *Kamini*, that brings in the most amount of money.

Clearly, the mainstream readership is less interested in stories of massacre and oppression of the marginalised sections of the society than in interviews of bollywood film celebrities. So, even in this frame narrative, we get a clue as to why the marginalised sections of the society remain voiceless. One of the reasons why the subaltern cannot speak is because the mainstream people lack the will to listen to them. We lack the will to listen to the subaltern.

And, this is of course, explained by the fact that the gossip magazine the tabloid magazine sells more than the newspaper which publishes Puran's articles on the persecution of the lower caste and of the tribals. But, a more complete answer to the question as to why the

subaltern cannot speak, emerges during the course of Puran Sahay's journey to Pirtha and it is to this journey that we now turn.

Much like Marlow's journey in the *Heart of Darkness*, Puran Sahay, in the story *Pterodactyl*, also only gradually arrives at the location, which is both the geographical destination of the journey, as well as a site of a grave physical and moral crisis. In *Heart of Darkness*, of course, this site, this location, was the inner station where Kurtz was and in case of this story, in case of Puran's journey, it is Pirtha located in Madhya Pradesh.

Again, like Marlow, Puran starts on his journey to Pirtha with certain received ideas regarding the area and the people that he is visiting. And, in Marlow's case, these ideas were shaped by the colonial discourse on Africa and in case of Puran, his notions are shaped by various books, government reports and published statistical data on the region of Madhya Pradesh where Pirtha is located.

Thus, when Puran is on his way to the adivasi area on a supplied truck, which carries government munificence for the tribals in the form of rice, molasses, and popcorn, he opens a book which informs him about the government figures on Madhya Pradesh and these figures are important. The importance of these figures will become evident to you as we proceed with the story.

But these are the figures that Puran reads out from the book- 22.97% of the population of Madhya Pradesh is tribal. The economy of the state is mainly based on agriculture. The main crops of this region include jawar, wheat and rice. The region also grows some "lesser food grains." These are referred to as lesser food grains, not by Puran, but by the book that he is reading and they include kodo, kutki, and soma.

And, in 1983-84, the book tells Puran, the wave of Green Revolution, which have started in Haryana, Punjab, and western Uttar Pradesh, had also swept across Madhya Pradesh and now, the state is on the verge of another revolution, which is the Soya Bean Revolution.

Now, having introduced these data, which forms the official discourse on Madhya Pradesh and its inhabitants, Devi then masterfully interlaces it with stories of rampant poverty stories of exploitation, stories of deaths and suicide among the tribal community. The government

data does nothing to explain these stories, nor does it help Puran explain the reality that he sees in front of him in relief camps of Pirtha.

And this includes the reality of an emaciated old woman holding a skeleton baby in her arms waiting for some sort of food to come her way. This gap between the reality of Pirtha and the government discourse brings us back to the question of the voice of the subaltern because the reason this gap exists is because the old tribal woman carrying her malnourished child and waiting for food in the relief camp of Pirtha cannot speak about her condition.

Now, this absence of tribal discourse, as we learn while we journey with Puran to the heart of Pirtha, is caused by a number of reasons. The foremost among these is, of course, the sheer apathy of the mainstream people, the mainstream media and the government to listen to the voice of the tribals. The discourse on Madhya Pradesh that is ratified by the government and that is apparently supported by objective statistical data, builds up, as we have just seen, a narrative of progress, a narrative of growth.

Even to make an effort to listen to the tribal would mean, therefore, to accommodate within this discourse of progress and growth, a scandalous counter-narrative of disposition and exploitation. To hear the voice of the tribals would actually mean acknowledging the disturbing fact that in a state whose economic mainstay is agriculture and which has undergone the green revolution, the inhabitants of Pirtha suffers perennially from drought and has to make do with the so-called lesser food grains like kodo, kutki, and soma.

And, this too, is often siphoned out of this region by black marketers. As Puran comes to learn and I quote from the text, “Nobody will allow you to say, that an atom of the green revolutionary area of the state of Madhya Pradesh is in the perpetual famine zone of extreme backward tribals.” This is a statement that the institutionally ratified discourse won’t allow to be spoken, won’t admit because, of course, it spoils the narrative of progress, of growth, and of development.

The tribals cannot speak because their speech can potentially undercut the officially sanctioned discourse of growth and of progress. And, the voice of tribal is thus never accorded agency or validity by the mainstream institutions. Instead, his reality is papered over by officials who visit the region of Pirtham for instance, only during the months of rain

and then refuse to admit on paper that the region suffers from severe drought and perennial starvation.

The reality of the tribal is also denied by government regulations, for instance, which stipulate that a certain number of people need to die before an area can be declared a famine zone. In the sparsely populated tribal area of Pirtha that magic number of dead bodies is never achieved, can never be achieved, though death surrounds Pirtha from all sides. And because this magic number can never be achieved, Pirtha never gets classified as a famine zone.

Thus, though the old woman holding the emaciated child sits before Puran's eyes in the relief camp, she is more of a mirage than a reality. Why? Because the government records, the official data which tells the truth to the mainstream people, not only denies her existence, but indeed denies the entire reality of disposition that frames this existence.

Apart from this reluctant to admit the tribal voice and tribal reality within the institutionally ratified mainstream discourse, there are other more mundane reasons as to why the tribals cannot speak. For instance, centuries of deprivation has ensured that the tribals remain mentally and physically incapable to fight for their voices to be heard, to fight for their rights.

Thus, agitating for a socio-political agency remains an unaffordable luxury for the old tribal woman sitting in the relief camp, who has to rely on the largest of NGO's and some well-meaning government officials to stave off death. As one of these well-meaning government officials point out to Puran, the tribals of Pirtha suffering from perennial starvation and scarcity of resources have become resigned to their subalternity.

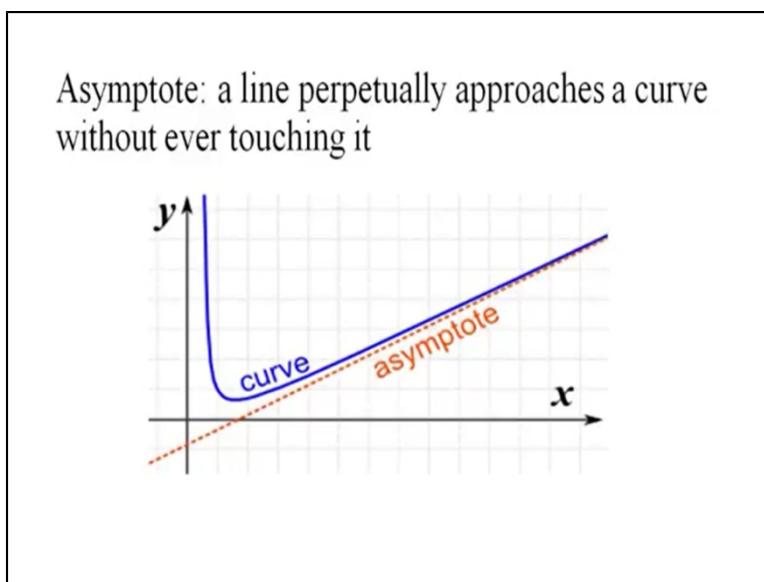
In his own words, and I quote "A few thousand people have now accepted despair. They don't know how to ask, don't ask but they take, if given". Apart from this lack of basic resources like food, what also curtails the ability of the tribals to find their voice within the mainstream is the language barrier."

Now, in any society, the hegemonic discourse privileges certain languages and by doing so, establishes a hierarchy among the various language speakers within the society. Those who

speak the privileged languages of the hegemonic discourse, they get greater access to socio-political agency than others.

And, within the Indian context too, we can see such privileging at work and, of course, within the Indian context, languages like English and Hindi enjoy the most amount of privilege. And this, in turn, ensures that speakers of tribal languages like Ho, for instance, or Mundari or Santali, remain almost completely cut off from social and political agency. This situation, in fact, is imagined in the story through the metaphor of an asymptote.

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Now, some of you will know that, in an asymptote, a line perpetually approaches a curve without ever touching it. There is no point of contact in an asymptote just like there is no point of communication between the mainstream people and the subalternised tribal. In the story, therefore, the tribals that we meet either have enormous difficulty in speaking to Puran, and here I am thinking of this figure of Shankar who can only speak in a trancelike state, or they do not speak at all like, for instance, the child Bikhia.

This theme of tribal speechlessness is most powerfully brought to the fore in the story through Puran's encounter with what the title refers to as the Pterodactyl. So, while staying in an abandoned hut in Pirtha, Puran hears, in a room next to his, the soft breathing of a large birdlike creature and since Puran is accustomed to understanding the reality that is in front of his eyes with reference to books, he reads and identifies this creature as a Pterodactyl- a flying reptile of the Mesozoic era.

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Pterodactyl



But such bookish knowledge makes the Pterodactyl an impossible reality just as the government records and official data makes the old tribal woman in the relief camp an impossible reality. This is in spite of the fact that for Puran, both the birdlike creature, as well as the old woman, exists in front of his very eyes. They both exist in front of Puran as almost tactile reality.

Yet, the other reality that is constructed through books, through government records, through documents, denies this reality that Puran can touch, smell and see before him. So, one of the questions that really come up when we read this story and, as you can see, I have not actually summarise this story like I have not summarised any of the texts that we have read so far in this course and, as usual, I would really encourage you to go to this story and read this very powerful narrative by Mahasweta Devi. You will really like it, I am quite sure.

But when we read the story, one of the questions that we are confronted with is that- is this pterodactyl some kind of a symbol which symbolises the tribals, for instance? Now, there are indeed points of similarity which connects the pterodactyl with the tribals. Just like Puran finds it impossible to communicate with the tribals, for instance, he also finds it impossible to communicate with the pterodactyl whose silence, in the face of Puran's questioning gaze, echoes the speechlessness of the subaltern tribals.

Yet, the story does not really allow us to embrace this interpretation of the pterodactyl as the symbolic equivalent of the tribal reality. The creature presents itself as different things to different people. So, for the tribals, who have seen it hovering in the night sky and who had

described it as unearthly terror, the creature is the incarnation of their ancestors' soul. It has come to them as a warning. This is what the tribals feel.

The pterodactyl, which is an incarnation of their ancestors' soul, has come to them as a warning, as a messenger, announcing the impending doom of the entire tribal community under the exploitation of the mainstream civilisation. For Puran, on the other hand, who draws his categories of understanding from books and from documents, this creature is an extinct species of the Pterosauria class, of the Mesozoic era.

Now, the story doesn't decide either way but nearly gives the expression to the sense of frustration that we feel when we encounter something that we neither know nor we can communicate with. And this is precisely the sense of frustration that the elite, guided by an ethical imperative, experiences when facing the speechless subaltern.

And here, the frustration is not simply because one cannot reach out and help the subaltern, but also, because one cannot know what crucial wisdom the subaltern might hold yet cannot communicate to the mainstream people. So, what ethical action is really possible in this asymptotic situation where there is no point of communication? Because, as you know, from the past lecture, we have been trying to think through this problem of ethics.

So, we again come back to this ethical question- what ethical action is possible in this situation of crisis? Well, Devi in her story, clearly rules out any attempt to bring "development" to the tribals. Though this has been the usual government attitude to develop the tribals, to bring development to them and much like the elite trying to speak for the subaltern, these actions of development, too, presume what the tribals need and desire, without ever consulting the tribals themselves.

The patronising gesture of development, thus, merely results in the imposition of things on the tribal society which intensifies their exploitation rather than helping them in any which way. For instance, the story mentions the government project of building roads from the tribal welfare money without any consultative process and these roads, as the story explains, connect the tribals with the mainstream in disastrous ways. As a text says, and I quote, "These roads have been built with the money sanctioned for tribal welfare."

So the owners of bonded labour, the moneylender, the touts and pimps, the abductors and the bestial alcoholic young men lusting after tribal women, can enter directly into the tribal habitations. So, in a way, the story says that the tribals were better off cut off from the mainstream rather than having roads built which connect them with the mainstream and which, in turn, intensifies their exploitation.

The epidemic that Puran finds raging in Pirtha also results from such misguided government munificence. To implement the government scheme of Farm Aid Week, the story mentions such a government scheme, people descends upon Pirtha and sprays insecticide all over the dusty fields of the tribals lying barren because of drought. A sudden flash of rain in the midst of this drought, washes the insecticide into the wells the tribals had dug to store their drinking water.

Thus, the Farm Aid initiative actually ends up poisoning whatever little source of water the tribals of Pirtha had been able to collect for their survival, and thereby, it leads to an epidemic. And, the story really gives a number of such instances where well-meaning government projects, which are implemented without taking the tribals on board, without having any consultation process, they backfire, they lead to disastrous consequences.

Mahasweta Devi, in her interview with Spivak, and I have already referred to this interview in my previous lecture, thus insists that our first task should be to stop such misguided development of the tribals in which they themselves do not have any stake. But is there any alternative, then? Well, Puran, near the end of the story, presents a report based on whatever he has seen and experienced.

And, in this report he talks about creating enabling conditions by reforming the laws, by reforesting the tribal areas and by building schools and centres for basket weaving, hand loom, and animal husbandry, so that the tribals can regain agency and finally be able to speak for themselves. And this is, in fact, the kind of work that we see activists like Mahasweta Devi and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak engage in.

However, we need to remember, that even this solution might be an imposition of the elites on the tribals. Indeed, the only solution that Shankar, who is a lone tribal voice who can speak to the mainstream society in the story Pterodactyl offers, comes in form of this

question- and I quote from the text, “Can you move far away? Very far? Very very far?” Hence, the only ethical gesture, that might end the subalternization of the tribals, may actually involve stopping all forms of interventions, ethical or otherwise.

But are we, the people who form the mainstream, are we willing to pay heed to this request? Are we willing to listen to the subaltern? Are we ready to allow the tribals to speak? I will leave you to ponder over these questions and we will meet later, in the last lecture of this series, to discuss the future of postcolonial studies. Thank you.

Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #20
Conclusion : Postcolonial Futures

Hello and welcome to this last lecture on postcolonial literature. Now, as the past nineteen lectures must have conveyed to you, the spirit of postcolonial studies has always been strongly informed by the desire to critique question and to dismantle whatever is established, whatever is regarded as the mainstream, whatever is regarded as the hegemonic. Now, it is almost forty years since the publication of Edward Said's pioneering text *Orientalism*, it was first published, if you remember, in 1978.

And, in these four decades, the field of postcolonial studies, which Said's text brought about into being, itself has become part of the academic establishment. And, today, to a large extent, it shapes the mainstream discourse within humanities. So, in this lecture, I will try to apply the spirit of critical dismantling that informs postcolonial studies to the field of postcolonial studies itself. And, by doing so, I will try and find out, if we are led to a new theoretical ground, a new Critical ground, if we managed to earn a new perspective.

Now, as you might have noticed, the title of this Lecture is, Postcolonial Futures. But, according to some Critics of Postcolonial studies, this field has no Future at all. Indeed, this death of Postcolonial studies, has been announced by no less a figure than, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who is regarded as one of the Holy Trinity, in the field of Postcolonial Studies. And, Spivak, in 2013 for instance, has relegated Postcolonialism, to the past.

To quote her, I think Postcolonial, this is Spivak, "I think, Postcolonial, is the day before yesterday." So, she was clearly trying to distance herself, from Postcolonialism, with which her name, is now synonymous with. Yet, even after being renounced by Spivak, the term Postcolonial keeps regularly appearing, in the titles of Academic Journals, Monographs, and University Courses, including this Course, our Course, which is titled, Postcolonial Literature.

And, this is 2017. So, and Spivak was announcing the death of Postcolonialism, in 2013. In fact, the Book from which I borrowed Spivak's quotation, is Ania Loomba's famous introduction to the field of Postcolonial studies titled, Colonialism/Postcolonialism. And, this Book, went into its Third Edition in 2015, just within 17 years of its Publication.

And, such continuing demand for Introductory Manuals, and Academic Courses on Postcolonial Literary studies show, that the field is clearly far from being dead, and done with. One might even argue that, with each such announcement of the demise of Postcolonialism, the field has only become stronger. And, each announcement of the death of Postcolonialism, has led to a greater profusion of studies, bearing the title, Postcolonialism.

So, why is it, that in spite of frequently being declared dead, Postcolonial studies continue to remain a strong presence, within the academia. Well, announcements of the death of Postcolonial studies, are actually informed by deep-seated doubts and questions regarding, what are considered by the Criticising voices, as the basic premises of this academic field. Yet, these questions and doubts, rather than making Postcolonial studies irrelevant, merely help it, or has helped it so far, to mutate into newer forms.

In fact, Postcolonial studies has not died precisely, because of this incredible capacity to mutate, that it has shown so far. And, this has of course, been a help to buy the vagueness, that surrounds almost every term, associated with this field of Postcolonial studies. Now, in all my past Lectures, I have tried to remove this vagueness, that surrounds various terms associated with Postcolonialism, so that, you can have, a more clear perspective, as a student.

But, in this Lecture, I would try and foreground, some of that vagueness, which I had deliberately left out, or which I had deliberately tried removing, in my earlier Lectures. And, I will do this because, I think to understand the probable Futures of Postcolonial studies. We need to know something, about the transformative possibilities, that these zones of vagueness, hold out. So, let us start our enquiry, with the term, Postcolonialism itself.

If you go back to the initial Lectures, in this series, where I was trying to define the term Postcolonialism for you, you will see that, I had limited the meaning of the term Postcolonialism, or rather the term Colonialism, in a particular way. And, I had limited the meaning of the term Colonialism, to take into account, only that form of Colonialism, which was initiated by certain European countries, since the 16th century.

And, I had limited the meaning of the term, to only take into account, that form of Colonialism, which is driven by the profit-making imperatives of Capitalism. Now, if Colonialism is to be defined, as the forceful occupation of the land and resources, of one group of people by another, then such activities, has been going on, in the human history, from time immemorial. And, therefore, to have the 16th century, as a cut-off date for Colonialism, is ultimately arbitrary.

But, in my initial set of Lectures, I had in fact alerted you, to this arbitrariness. What I had not alerted you to, is the other way in which, I was limiting the use of the term, Colonialism. And, I am going to talk about this, other arbitrary way in which, I have limited the use of the term Colonialism during Discourse, but I have not spoken about it, so far. So, this is something like, letting the Cat, out of the Bag.

Now even, if we chronologically limit our understanding of Colonialism, to being a post 16th century phenomenon, you will realise that, this period, has witnessed different kinds of Colonialism, by different European countries. Thus, for instance, the 16th century Spanish Colonialism of Peru, was markedly different from the 18th century British Colonialism of India, which in turn, was again, very different from the 20th century Italian Colonialism of Ethiopia.

Yet, as you will know, in this course, whenever we have referred to Colonialism, we have disregarded this variety, and have implicitly understood Colonialism, to mean, just British Colonialism, of places like the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and the Caribbean islands. Now, such vague, and indeed, biased use of the term Colonialism, has been integral, not only to these Lectures, that I have delivered, but it has been integral indeed, to the field of Postcolonial studies itself.

And, this in spite of the fact, that Edward Said in his Orientalism, had spoken extensively, about the context of French Colonialism, and the French Colonial Discourse. Now, in their introduction to the Book titled, Francophone Postcolonial Studies, which was published in 2014, the editors Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy, notes this Anglophone bias, and mentions it as the very fact, which has led them, to highlight the French, or Francophone aspects of Postcolonialism.

Now, this is indeed, a major piece of Criticism, levelled against the way, and biased understanding of the term Colonialism, within the field of Postcolonial studies. But, this Criticism, has not made Postcolonialism, redundant. So, in spite of the Criticism, that Postcolonialism does not have a clue, about the complexity of Colonialism, about the complexity and variety of the different kinds of European Colonialism, that existed from say, between 1500 to 1950.

The field of Postcolonialism, even today, has not become redundant. Indeed, the field has merely transformed itself, to now include, various kinds of Postcolonialism. So, when we talk about Postcolonialism today, we talk not just of Anglophone Postcolonial studies, but we simultaneously talk about Francophone Postcolonial studies for instance, or Lusophone Postcolonial studies.

And, these different sort of threads of Postcolonial studies, focus on the different kinds of Colonial experiences, and Colonial legacies, that various European Colonial powers had subjected to, the different parts of the world, that they Colonised. And, indeed, as you can see, the term Postcolonial, features very prominently, in the title of Charles Forsdick and David Murphy's Book itself, which Criticises, the existing field of Postcolonial studies.

So, as Charles Forsdick and David Murphy writes, that they have deliberately chosen, not to do away with the field of Postcolonial studies, but to merely introduce the angle of francophony, to that field. Now, the vagueness surrounding the use of the term Colonialism, has also another aspect to it. By limiting, the use of the term Colonialism, to mean only British Colonialism, we have not really been able to focus, on how, Colonialism is active even today, in spite of the fact, that the British raj for instance, has died as a political entity, long ago.

Now, here, when I am saying that, Colonialism is still alive today, I am thinking of Neo-colonial powers like America for instance, which continue to subjugate vast parts of the world, by economic, as well as military means. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, in his Book titled, Postcolonial Environments, which was originally published in 2010, draws our attention, to this continuation of Colonialism

When he says that, and I quote from the Book, “The post in Postcolonial, marks not an end of Colonialism, but an end of a peculiar mode of Colonialism, which then shifts its gears, and evolves to another stage, obviously triggering a concomitant shift in the global struggles, against it.”

Here again, Mukherjee, by moving on to study the impact of this new form of Colonialism, on human and non-human aspects of the environment, is not killing off the older form of Postcolonial studies, which primarily focused on the Discourse Analysis of the European Colonisers, and the texts of resistance, emerging from the parts of the world, once Colonised by Europe. Rather, Mukherjee’s intervention, merely transforms the field of Postcolonial studies, by expanding its ambit.

Indeed, Mukherjee identifies himself, not as an Anti-Postcolonial Critic, but rather as a Critic, who represents, what he calls, the second wave of Postcolonial studies. Moving on to another problematic area, which the Critics of Postcolonial studies, regularly point out. And, this area, this problem area, is the way in which, this field of Postcolonial studies, constructs the Oxidant and the Orient, as belligerent opposites.

Now, such a worldview, which looks at the Oxidant and the Orient, as perpetually engaged in relationship of belligerence, in a relationship of fighting opposition is, you will agree, a rather simplistic understanding of the complex Colonial reality. So, not all Indians for instance, opposed the European Colonial rule, and nor did all Europeans, support the project of Colonial subjugation.

A desire to recognise and address this issue, has again opened new research areas, within the field of Postcolonial studies, thereby transforming and expanding this field, in new ways. For instance, new research has highlighted, how sections of the subjugated population, including sections of Middle Class Nationalists, collaborated with the European Colonisers, to uphold and sustain the Colonial rule.

And, here for instance, I am thinking of a figure like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. And, if you remember, our discussion of Bankim Chandra Chattpadhyay, you will remember, how we discussed him, both as a figure, who pioneered the Discourse of Middle Class Nationalism, and also a supporter of British rule in India. So, even though dismantling, but, no before, I want to make, another point here.

So, on the one hand, we have Critics, who have highlighted this collaboration, between subjugated Indians, and the Colonisers, to sustain the Colonial rule. On the other hand, Scholars like Leela Gandhi for instance, in her Book, Affective Communities, has foregrounded, how some Europeans collaborated with Colonised subjects, to form a United Front, against Colonial rule. So, in some cases, we see Colonised subjects, collaborating with the European Colonial Masters, to perpetuate the Colonial rule.

In other cases, we see, how some Europeans, have collaborated with the Colonised subjects, in parts of the Colonised world like India, to fight the Colonial rule. So, even though, dismantling Eurocentrism, still remains one of the central agendas of, various Postcolonial scholars. The field of Postcolonial study, has gradually moved away, from conceiving the relationship between the Oxidant and the Orient, merely in terms of Antagonism.

And, it has now become more aware, of the various networks of connection, that held together, and indeed still holds together, the subjugator and the subjugated, within the frame of Colonialism. Now, finally, I would like to end this Lecture, by commenting on the role of intellectual, as conceived within this field of Postcolonial studies. Because, here again, we encounter a certain degree of vagueness, which has opened up the field of Postcolonial studies, to adverse Criticism.

Now, Postcolonial studies again, this you will know, if you have been listening carefully to our Lectures, emerged as a field of enquiry, within the English Literature Departments. And, this has meant, that Postcolonial studies, had initially concerned primarily with Literature Criticism, and with Discourse Analysis.

However, if you look at the career of Edward Said, the Founding Father of Postcolonial Studies, we see that, he was not only a Literary Critic, but also a person, who believed in engaging more directly, in Political action. Indeed, one of the more remarkable photograph, that we have of Edward Said, shows him, throwing a stone, at an Israeli Guardhouse, to protest, what he saw, as Israel's Hostile occupation of Palestinian Land.

And today, Said, is as much remembered as an activist, as he is remembered as a Literary Critic. However, as Graham Huggan notes in his survey of the state of Postcolonial studies, in the introduction to his 2008 Book titled, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*, the value of Literature, has consistently gone down, within this field, while more active intervention, has come to the foreground.

And, we have seen examples of such active intervention, by Postcolonial scholars, when we discussed, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work as a teacher, among the landless villagers of West Bengal, for instance. But, more recently, this has resulted in attempts, by Postcolonial scholars, to rethink the value of Literature, vis-à-vis, their Socio-Political activism. Huggan's own Book, *Interdisciplinary Measures*, provides precisely such an attempt, to make an argument, for the value of Literature, in conceiving Ethical action.

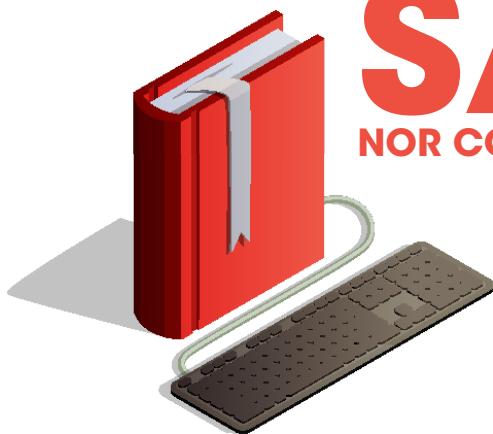
To quote Huggan, "Literature, is a vital tool, in what the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o calls, decolonisation of the mind. In the continuing struggle, to create new possibilities of thinking, as well as living, for previously exploited and dispossessed peoples, Literature, plays a formative role." So, the study of Literature, remains invaluable, or Critics are rediscovering its value, if you will, to understand Ethical action, to understand, how to guide the action, of exploited and dispossessed people.

Now, since we have mentioned, Spivak as an example of a Postcolonial Critic, who is also known for her activism, it is worth noting here, that Spivak's latest Book titled, Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalisation, which was published in 2012, also makes a very strong case, for Literature and Literary imagination, as a basis for Ethical action.

So, this re-imagining of Literature, of the value of Literature, of the value of Literary Imagination, and how Literature can train our Ethical responses, to various crisis, also presents itself, as one of the many directions, towards which Postcolonial studies might move towards, in the Future. And, with this, we come to an end of our course, on Postcolonial Literature.

I hope, you have enjoyed listening to the Lectures. And, more importantly, I hope, this course has been able to help you, look at Literature, as well as, the World around you, which bears indelible marks of Colonialism, in a whole new light. Thank you, for bringing us, through these Lectures. Good bye.

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