

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 19 Lectures, must have conveyed to you, the spirit of Postcolonial studies, has always been strongly informed, by the desire to Critic question, and to dismantle, whatever is established, whatever is regarded as the Mainstream, whatever is regarded as the Hegemonic. Now, it is almost 40 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 Chattopadhyay, 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.